



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

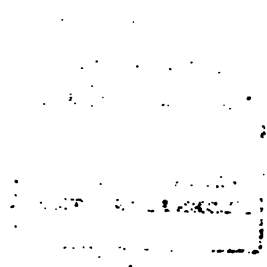


3 3433 07482293 7

NBO
Barbour



THE GOLDEN HEART



**THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY**

**ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS**

12/18/72

THE GOLDEN HEART

By
RALPH HENRY BARBOUR

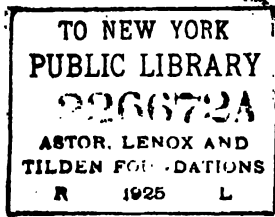
AUTHOR OF

"KITTY OF THE ROSES," "AN ORCHARD PRINCESS," "A
MAID IN ARCADY," "HOLLY," "MY LADY OF
THE FOG," "THE LILAC GIRL," ETC.

With Illustrations in Color by
CLARENCE F. UNDERWOOD
and Decorations by
EDWARD STRATTON HOLLOWAY



PHILADELPHIA & LONDON
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
1910



COPYRIGHT, 1910
BY J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

Published September, 1910

WV VV
2001
YV 301

*Printed by J. B. Lippincott Company
The Washington Square Press,
Philadelphia, U. S. A.*



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
Her eyes sparkled like the blue waters of the channel <i>Frontispiece</i>	
She was slender as well, and he liked that.	29
Coatless and hatless Paul sat in his dory	82
He returned to The Golden Heart, examining it through and over his glasses	142
A plump matron in Irish lace declared she had always wanted to talk to an artist	184

THE GOLDEN HEART

I.

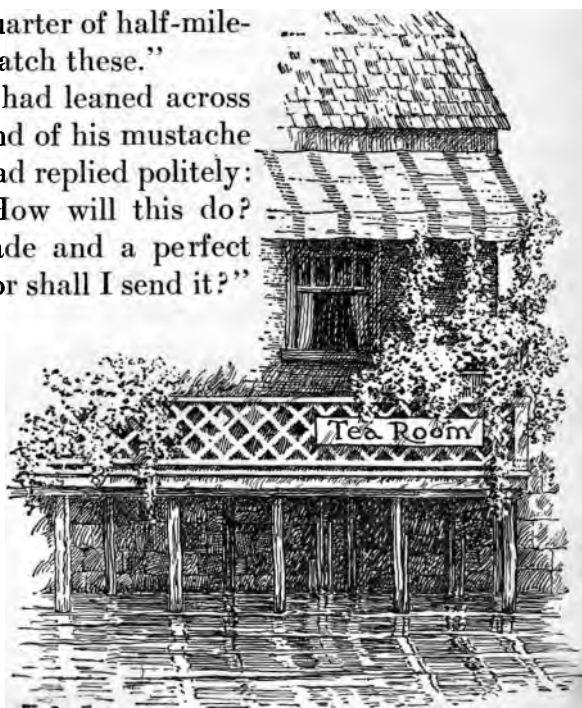
THE harbor was blue—intensely, ridiculously, wastefully blue—as though all the indigo in the world had been washed into it,—so blue that the big, wide, cloudless sky seemed faded in comparison,—so blue that Natalie's eyes, which were quite the bluest things under that same sky, matched it absolutely, just as though she had stepped to the edge of the balcony here, opened those eyes very wide and said:

“I want a mile and a quarter of half-mile-wide harbor, please, to match these.”

And as though Nature had leaned across his counter, twirling an end of his mustache a trifle flirtatiously, and had replied politely:

“Certainly, ma'am. How will this do? It's quite the newest shade and a perfect match. Will you take it or shall I send it?”

Just as though!



THE GOLDEN HEART

It was so deeply, fervidly, vehemently blue, so ardently blue, that it brought a little half-uttered gasp to Natalie's lips and a funny little pang to her heart. Don't ask me to explain the pang, for at twenty all sorts of pangs and twinges come nibbling at one's heart and one doesn't even try to explain them. (When we are forty we know that they are touches of neuralgia or rheumatism and we hunt up the lithia tablets.) Natalie's pang was very much like the pangs that came when she heard Godard's Second Waltz or a certain air from *Bohème*, or when a salty breeze swept across the meadow and brushed her face with a heart-disturbing fragrance of white foam and pink clover. Sometimes then she closed her eyes to warn the tears back. Those pangs were neither pain nor joy, and yet were both. Perhaps, since so little lies behind one at twenty, they were premonitory-whispers of things to come, tiny ghosts of future aches and throbs, pleasures and sorrows!

But the pang lasted only the length of a heart beat, and the half-sad, half-question-



THE GOLDEN HEART

ing droop of her mouth lasted no longer. A smile chased it away as she leaned over the railing of the little balcony and feasted her eyes on the scene before her. Such a wonderful blue June world as it was! The morning tide was running in strongly through the channel on the farther side of Strawberry Island, and out there the broken surface gleamed and glittered in the sunlight, dazzling the eyes like hammered metal. Below her the water was rising about the spiles, lapping at the barnacles and combing out the green seaweed tresses. Here, in the shadows, the water was like dark green glass and she could look down through it and see the shells and pebbles against the sand.

The *tap-tap* of a hammer drew her gaze across to the centre of the harbor. On Dory Rock, a tiny ledge not much larger than a city back yard, Anton Sylva, the Portuguese lobsterman, was mending his pots in the shade of the little drift-wood cabin where he dwelt. Natalie could see the rise and fall of his bare brown arm and, against the purplish shadow of the cabin,



THE GOLDEN HEART

the nodding of his head, as white as though encrusted with sea-salt.

Beyond Dory Rock, on the opposite shore, a narrow crescent of sand lay like a corn-colored ribbon between sea and land. Above it the white hotel gleamed in the sunlight. To the left the shore advanced and retreated in a confusing jumble of tiny coves and billowed away into forests of pine and hemlock and white oak. At the right of the hotel the town of Rockhaven began and straggled away along the harbor front, ambling up the low hill here and there, with one energetic lane climbing zig-zag right up to the summit where the old stone beacon stands. Along the water quaint tumble-down wharves jutted out over the rocks, and on Saturdays the black-hulled schooners came scudding up the harbor with all their gray, patched sails bellying in the wind to nestle up against the old wharves like birds coming home to their nests. As the road swung around the head of the harbor toward the Neck the white cottages became scattered. From where she stood Natalie could see the fish houses up there, standing brown



THE GOLDEN HEART

and green and yellow, each with its patch of snowy white cloth under which the salted fish were drying and bleaching on the flakes. The glare offended her eyes and she turned them away and followed the road as it appeared and reappeared between the straggling houses and trees until, so to speak, she was back again at her own front door.

Her gaze had travelled several miles in as many minutes and her mind had been no less busy. Evidently, though, her thoughts had not been altogether pleasant, for the smile had faded from her face again, giving place to an expression of wistfulness. Just what the trouble was she couldn't have said. Perhaps it was only that she was growing a little bit tired of serving tea and selling copper pen-trays and art pottery and picture post-cards to visitors in gray and pink and green and blue chiffon veils who came to the door in automobiles and seldom had anything smaller than a twenty-dollar bill in their gold mesh purses. Still, she didn't think it was altogether that. Her trouble seemed larger, more general, even though she couldn't just locate it. She looked



THE GOLDEN HEART



across the harbor, her slim white figure leaning against the railing, and pondered it. Something was distinctly unsatisfactory to-day. It wasn't the weather. That was perfect. It wasn't the view. That, too, was perfect. It wasn't a question of health. She hadn't had even a headache for weeks. It was—it was——

Now she knew!

She wanted an interest in life!

It came to her suddenly, bringing a brief smile of triumph. It seemed strange that she hadn't realized it before. Her life was very empty. Other girls had interests, she had none; none, that is, save the usual ones that one grows up with, like one's family. A few days ago the tea house had supplied the dimly felt want, but to-day that had palled. She wanted something—something more, something bigger, something to lift her out of the ordinary, every-day rut of petty, trivial things. A wave of self-pity enveloped her and she sighed troubledly. Then she began to go over mentally the list of her girl friends. The result was depressing. In almost every case where they had

THE GOLDEN HEART

attained to her age they had found an interest by acquiring a husband and, in some cases, children. That wasn't helpful since she had long since determined to have nothing to do with husbands. All the husbands she had studied had been disappointing. They were selfish persons who spent their days at offices and their evenings at clubs and were always too tired to do what their wives wanted them to do. There had been a time, a silly romantic period now a full year past, when she too had considered matrimony as a career. But all that was done with. She had had admirers enough, so many, in fact, that to single out one special one had been too great a task for her, and she had said no very coldly and kindly to all with a sense of deep relief. As for children, well, she was awfully fond of children, but as having children meant having a husband it was plain that they were not destined to supply the desired interest. Of course, some folks adopted them, but you never could be certain what you were getting.

Some few of her acquaintances had not married and these had gone in for settlement



THE GOLDEN HEART

work or church work or were running around Europe staring cathedrals out of countenance. Natalie considered. Settlement work might do, but she would have to wait until Autumn to take that up. It was the same with church work, for she simply couldn't interest herself in the church at Rockhaven. No girl could. The minister was fifty and very fat, and his wife was distinctly ill-bred and disagreeable. As for cathedrals—oh, she had seen so many of those; and art galleries, as well. And, anyhow, she couldn't wander around Europe alone, and papa was much too busy to go with her. No, what she wanted was an immediate interest; something she could reach right out and take hold of, something——

The soft complaining of oars against thole-pins aroused her. Coming toward her under the shade of the big willow that overhung the sea-wall was a skiff. In it was a broad-shouldered, coatless individual of the male sex whose brown arms, bare to the elbows, handled the oars with a smooth dexterity pleasant to see. He was bare-



THE GOLDEN HEART

headed as well as bare-armed, and his dark hair had a tousled look as though he had been running his fingers through it; which was just what he had been doing for the better part of the morning. In the bow of the skiff lay a folded easel, a dejected white umbrella, a denim bag into which a big cedar paint-box fitted protestingly, and a canvas lying face downward on top of all, something in its position suggesting that it had been flung there in disgrace and contumely.

Natalie was a bit disappointed, for artists in and about Rockhaven are like pebbles on a beach. One stumbles over them everywhere, anywhere, at all times between sunrise and dusk. Their white umbrellas dot the landscape like drunken toadstools. If Holland is famous for its windmills, then Rockhaven is famous for its white umbrellas. It wasn't that Natalie disliked artists; merely that she had lost interest in them. She had met a good many and in her experience had portioned them roughly into two classes, irrespective of sex. In the first class were the younger ones, beginners usually, who



THE GOLDEN HEART

talked "shop" on the slightest provocation and were tiresomely self-centred and amazingly enthusiastic. The second class contained the older ones. These avoided the mere mention of their profession, preferred to be known as painters, and affected a blasé attitude that Natalie found more irritating than the garrulity of the younger men.

The skiff floated noiselessly along, pushing a little water-wrinkle ahead of it and reflecting itself in the bottle-green depths. There is a great difference in backs, a great difference in their expressions. Just what this particular back expressed Natalie didn't know, but she felt that it was something agreeable. The back was clad in a thin white shirt and the shirt was adorned on the right shoulder with a brilliant daub of cobalt, unintentionally placed there in the operation of reflectively rubbing an ear with the tip of a brush. Being vowed to a life of celibacy establishes one on a plain of superiority where the opposite sex is concerned. Secure in the impregnability of her position, Natalie continued to lean on



THE GOLDEN HEART

the railing and regard the skiff and its passenger in judicial calm, superlative unconcern,—in short, with just about the same absence of embarrassment she would have displayed had the skiff been Anton Sylva's old blue dory and the occupant old Anton himself.

How beautiful is courage! And, alas, how often disastrous!

A breeze rippled the still surface, the merest catspaw, hardly more than a breath, as though some peeping, hidden nereid, wise with the wisdom of thousands of years, laughed softly at what she saw. Or perhaps the tiny commotion was caused by the flutter of hovering, unseen wings.

The skiff passed lightly below the balcony. A pair of careless brown eyes wandered idly to the wall and the spiles, roamed upward to the balcony and lingered on the tip of a small shoe, wondered and pondered, while the oars still dipped and rose, quested further and discovered flecks of white through the trailing vines, and then leaped upward to the blue eyes above as undeviatingly as steel leaps to the magnet. An



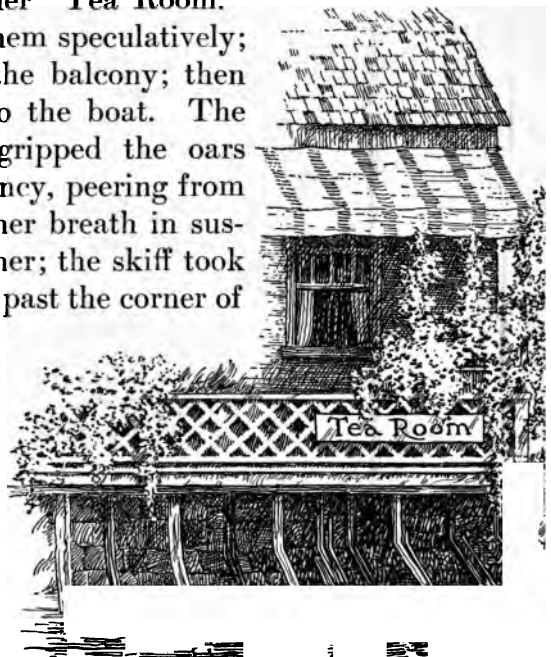
THE GOLDEN HEART

eerie whisper filled the air. You, perhaps, are unimaginative, and will say that a breeze fluttered the leaves of the willow. That as you like, but Natalie heard it with a catch of her breath and a queer flutter at her heart. Her eyes dropped and she turned disturbedly toward the door. Below, the oars hung motionless, and from the blades the drops, glittering in the soft light, trickled like pearls.



II.

ROBBED of their magnet, the brown eyes, dimly sensible of loss, scanned the balcony eagerly. There was a flutter of disappearing white that spoke of retreat, and the balcony was empty. Along the rail boxes of flowers stood, and climbing nasturtiums, already bedecking themselves with their gaudy trumpets of yellow and orange and vermillion, were fast weaving a screen. Above, a faded striped awning hung, while over it peered a shingled gable with one latticed window. Two modest signs displayed themselves along the railing. One said "Gift Shop;" the other "Tea Room." The brown eyes viewed them speculatively; then wandered back to the balcony; then came protestingly back to the boat. The lean, sunburned hands gripped the oars again and the nereid, I fancy, peering from the green shadows, held her breath in suspense. One stroke; another; the skiff took up its course again; it was past the corner of



THE GOLDEN HEART



the tea house, its nose pointed straight for the head of the harbor. But the brown eyes still wandered to and fro and presently lighted on a flight of wooden steps which ran down the face of the sea-wall at the corner of the building. The oars faltered and became motionless. For a full minute the skiff floated indecisively in the sunlight. Then the musical creak of the oars in the thole-pins began once more and the skiff's nose pointed to the steps.

Paul Merritt whistled a tune as he tied the painter. It wasn't altogether pleasing, that tune, for he had a positive genius for flattening, but it served its purpose, which was to bolster his courage. He dragged his coat out from under a seat and slipped it on. Then he climbed the steps, glancing furtively about him. A few yards away ran the Neck Road. Beyond it the land sloped softly upwards and against the sky-line a fringe of grass was swaying gracefully in the breeze. At his right was a little fenced garden showing more promise than fulfillment, although a row of blue and white and lavender iris made a blur of color by the

THE GOLDEN HEART

gate. From the iris bed sprang a cedar post and from the post, asway on a wrought iron crane, hung a sign. The ground was black and against it flaming in the sunlight, was a golden heart, while quaintly-fashioned letters above and below announced "Tea House and Gift Shop." A path ran from the rustic gate to a roofed doorway. The door was open and from the dim interior came glints and flashes of brass and pottery, and as he stepped across the threshold a faint fragrance greeted him, a bouquet composed of all sorts of strange, quaint odors; a whiff of the smiling blue harbor through the open windows, of hand-wrought leather and Indian baskets, of sweet peas gleaming like a myriad of tiny white moths above a copper bowl, and, perceptible through all, the leit-motif as it were, the spicy, pungent incense of nasturtiums, that perfume which the fairies distil and call Memories.

It took him a moment to accustom his eyes to the dimness of the room. Then a white form loomed into sight, he stepped toward it and ran into a chair. And yet he retained his presence of mind.



THE GOLDEN HEART

“Good morning,” he said. “Do you—do you serve tea here?”

He meant his tone to be casually polite, but instead it was tense and hollow and hinted of tragedy. It sounded as though he had asked, “Will the patient live through the night?” And Natalie replied “Yes,” as simply as she could, yet seemed to be saying, “It is doubtful. We are doing everything possible.”

Whereupon Paul said “Thanks,” vaguely, and would have sat in a brass tray filled with pond lilies had not Natalie warned him with a little shriek of dismay.

“I beg your pardon, really,” he stammered. “I—it is—the light——”

His embarrassment restored her self-possession.

“I know. It is very confusing in here after the glare outside. We are thinking of having another window put in over there.”

Paul followed with his gaze the place indicated. It seemed a good location for a window, and he said so. Meanwhile she had pushed a chair forward and, having re-



THE GOLDEN HEART

covered his sight, he sat down in it with a smothered sigh of relief.

"Cream or lemon?" asked Natalie professionally.

He never drank tea if he could avoid doing so, and for a moment he hesitated. Then he decided in favor of lemon and Natalie disappeared into a room at the rear. Paul leaned back in his chair and examined his surroundings.

The room was spacious and unceiled. The woodwork was stained brown and curtains of unbleached muslin, stencilled with borders of blue sea-horses, hung at the windows. The floor held a few rugs. An ancient highboy, gay in new brasses, occupied a corner, and tables, scattered about the room, displayed the usual hodge-podge found in such places. There were trays and paper-cutters of etched copper, book-racks and boxes of carved wood, hand-illuminated mottoes and booklets, jugs and bowls and candlesticks of weird shapes and strange tones, silver jewelry set with unpolished stones, baskets, calendars, post-cards, picture puzzles, embroideries. There were



THE GOLDEN HEART

a good many pictures about the walls. Most of them were views of Rockhaven and vicinity, some good, some bad, many doubtful. Paul arose and looked them over, hunting for the signatures in the subdued light. Some he knew, notably that of Battle whose canvas showing sand dunes in sun and shadow with a piled-up mass of thunder clouds overhead filled him with admiration and a depressing realization of his own hopeless incompetency. While he was still analyzing it Natalie re-entered. She went to the old highboy in the corner and from a drawer took out a cloth and serviette.

“Where will you have your tea, please? In here or on the balcony.”

“The balcony, if I may,” replied Paul.

She went out through the doorway, her form poised a moment against the green and blue sunlit world. Paul followed slowly, aware of feeling unwontedly excited. When he reached the balcony she had spread the square cloth on a little table and placed a tiny bowl of pink petunias in the centre.

“If you’ll sit down,” she said, “I’ll bring



THE GOLDEN HEART

your tea in a moment. Will you have anything with it? Biscuits, Swedish wafers——”

“The flat things that taste like fish food? Some of those, please.” He drew forth his cigarette case, glanced at it, started to replace it and looked up inquiringly. “Is it allowed?” he asked.

“Certainly.” She paused in the doorway. “The ash tray is beside you,” she added with a smile. He looked about him.

“Thanks. Er—where do you mean?”

“Just over the railing, of course. Isn’t the harbor large enough?”

“Oh!” he replied. He was about to say something else equally brilliant when it occurred to him that she had a wonderfully pleasant smile. And while he was still considering it she went in, which was perhaps just as well since he had forgotten what he had meant to say. He lighted his cigarette, flicked the match into the nasturtiums and gazed somewhat vacantly at the bowl of petunias. It wasn’t like him to be so tongue-tied and awkward. He wondered what the matter could be. And while he was wondering a pair of very blue eyes came



THE GOLDEN HEART

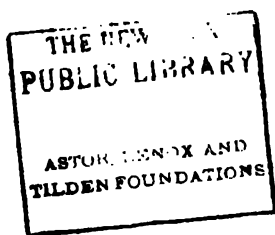


between him and the blossoms and got all tangled up with his thoughts.

After a moment he moved restlessly, tossed his half-consumed cigarette onto the floor, and looked impatiently at the doorway. Considering what vile stuff it was, tea required a lot of time in its preparation. Besides, he wanted very much to see those blue eyes again. For the life of him he couldn't recall another feature of hers, and he wondered whether the others were as pleasing as the eyes. He knew that as a whole she had seemed to him at the very first glance to be a remarkably charming girl. Now he questioned whether she wasn't a good deal more. He wished she would come back. He tilted back in his chair and looked out across the harbor between the leafy draperies. He never had seen the water so blue. It was like—why, hang it, it was like her eyes! His memory searched for a line or phrase which was whispering softly somewhere at the back of his mind. What was it? Ah, now he remembered! It was the title of a story he had once read, a story by that Hungarian chap whose name



SHE WAS SLENDER AS WELL, AND HE LIKED THAT



THE GOLDEN HEART

unded like choking on a fish bone. "Eyes
ke the Sea;" that was it. Only this girl's
es were like the sea when it was warmly,
eply, smilingly blue, the sea when it held
s suggestion of green. He was mentally
tting his palette with colors when Natalie
turned bearing a tray holding a little gray
neware teaset, a dainty cup and saucer,
tiny sugar bowl, a plate of toasted and
ttered wafers, and some slices of lemon.
ul's gaze came back from the harbor at a
und, and, while she placed the contents
the tray on the gleaming white cloth,
ade the most of its opportunity.

First, she was rather tall, and Paul, who
ld the large man's preference for small
omen, was disappointed. But she was
ender as well, and he liked that, just as
e liked the modelling of the small, firm,
und arms, which, descending from the
eeves, moved about the table before him.
bove all, she was wonderfully graceful;
hen she walked, when she bent over the
ay, even when she only moved a little pink
nger. She had brown hair; not brown like
s own, but paler; a brown that recalled to



THE GOLDEN HEART

him beech leaves lying under the trees in late Autumn. It was wonderfully fine and light and waved up and back from her forehead and was soft and fluffy above the ears and then gathered itself into a sort of bunch at the back. Paul wondered whether the gold barette held it there or whether it was a special dispensation of Providence that did it. Anyway, he was captivated by that hair and began to speculate as to the brush-strokes which would reproduce the effect on canvas. Then she straightened up and paused a step away to throw a final critical glance about the table and he could see her face.

Man, it is said, possesses a sixth sense which apprises him of the approach of danger. Woman, too, has a sixth sense whereby she instantly knows when she is being looked at. Perhaps the two are the same. I have no reason to suppose that Natalie was any exception. During the preceding moments she had not once cast so much as a glance at the customer, nor did she during the next moment. Yet she was regretfully aware that her waist had ac-



THE GOLDEN HEART

quired in its last visit to the laundress an annoying habit of wrinkling across her shoulders at the back, a fault which could only be remedied by a downward pull under the waistband, a remedy impossible to apply in public. So she kept her face to the table and considered the advisability of reaching the doorway by a series of backward steps.

Paul, with no thoughts for the shirt waist, was enjoying an uninterrupted scrutiny of her face. Enjoying is used advisedly, for no one could fail to find enjoyment in such a privilege. For the first second or two it was the artist in Paul who looked and commended. The eyes were just as blue as he had thought; the brows were long and well bowed; the nose was straight and, if a trifle too small, was well made; the mouth was all that he liked a woman's mouth to be; it wasn't a rosebud mouth; rosebud mouths in his experience opened only to utter inanities; it was small enough to match the other features and generous enough to promise sweetness of character; the chin was rounded and yet firm, with a tiny cleft in the hollow that had started out to be a



THE GOLDEN HEART

dimple and had changed its mind; the skin was finely grained and clear, with just a tinge of rose at the cheeks, and over all the tenderest, lightest, creamiest coat of tan that a kindly, gentlemanly sun ever laid; and across the bridge of the nose merrily marched a corporal's squad of golden freckles, a jovial, frolicsome band that supplied a saving touch of the commonplace to a face that might otherwise have been too faultless.

The artist in Paul frowned doubtfully over the freckles, but the man in him hailed them with delight. For it was the man who was uppermost now. When one is only twenty-six one can't always maintain the impersonal point of view. There is something very enticing, very human and lovable about freckles. I dare say that freckles and a pug nose have often won where a perfect skin and Grecian features have failed. To Paul that little skirmish line of freckles was a final triumph. He had never before realized how attractive freckles could be. Heretofore, had he considered them at all, he would have called them blemishes. Now,



THE GOLDEN HEART

however, he chose to fancy that the sun, wandering lovingly over the face before him, had placed them there as seals of approval.

"If there is anything else," said Natalie, "will you call, please?" She stepped back toward the doorway. Paul searched rapidly for a want, his eyes imploring the teapot and the lemon and all the other things to vanish that he might summon them anew and so make certain of her reappearance. But they remained stolidly before him.

"Thank you," he said dolefully. And then, just as she was being swallowed up in the brown twilight of the house, "What do I do with the lemon, please?" he asked. "Do I—ah—dump it in the cup and let it soak, or—or what? You see, I very seldom drink tea."

"I think that perhaps two slices will do," she answered calmly. "Unless you want it quite sour?"

"That's the point," he replied, placing three cubes of sugar on top of the lemon. "Do you suppose I do? Now how would you fix it, Miss—ah—Miss——"

"One and a half lumps of sugar and two



THE GOLDEN HEART

slices of lemon," she said promptly and soberly. "Then I'd stir up the sugar and punch the lemon with the spoon to get the juice out. And then—then I *think* that I'd drink it before it got cold."

"Oh," he said; "yes, of course, but then it's a warm day, and perhaps, after all, what I want is iced tea." This in triumph for the perfect glory of the idea. But she shook her head.

"I'm sorry, but the ice-man doesn't come around until noon, and it's now only a little after eleven."

"That's too bad," he replied, gazing at the petunias, "for I've quite set my heart on iced tea now. I suppose I might wait for him to come?" It was something between a question and a statement. As there was no reply he ventured to raise his eyes inquiringly and barely surprised a smile fluttering about her lips. He took heart. "Is that cheeky? Couldn't I wait? I'd sit here very quietly and—and look at the view. It's a beautiful view. And it's so nice and shady and cool here. Such a picturesque spot, isn't it?"



THE GOLDEN HEART

"I think so," she answered, quite grave again. "And, of course, if you really want to stay I suppose you may. But the ice-man may be late; he often is."

"That's great! I won't be—trespassing?"

"A tea house is a public place—in a way," she replied. "I suppose a customer has the right to stay as long as he cares to. As soon as the ice comes I will get your tea." She moved back again toward the shadow.

"In case I wanted something else—some more wafers—won't you tell me your name so I can call you?" he asked desperately.

A merry gleam came and went in the blue eyes.

"Just call 'Shop,' " she said.

Then she was gone.



III.

PAUL smiled at the petunias. Then he lighted a fresh cigarette, dropped the match on the floor and blew a fragrant cloud of smoke up toward the striped awning. A tugboat came puffing up the channel and he watched it until it was lost to view among the wharves across the harbor. There must be something very pleasing in the sight of a tugboat pushing her blunt, saucy nose through the water, for Paul smiled contentedly all the while. You would have liked that smile. It lighted up a pair of merry brown eyes, drew up the corners of a well-formed mouth, and lent an added air of insouciance to the short mustache with its perked up ends. It was an undeniably good-looking face, at once clever and careless, good-tempered and firm, the sort of face that reflects clean thoughts and clean living, the face of a man who has yet to find himself and who is meanwhile viewing the world with happy, untroubled interest; in



THE GOLDEN HEART

short, a face that might well of right belong to a chap of twenty-six who has lived wholesomely and normally and to whom Care is only a meaningless word. It was a very brown face, for in summer hats and caps were not included in Paul's scheme of things, and the sun had had its way with him.

The tugboat no longer to be told from numerous other craft, huddled over there along the wharves, Paul's gaze roved along the harbor. It picked out the hotel and descried the window of his room, wandered down the green shore and crossed the sun-flecked channel to Strawberry Island. It tried to make out the weather flag flying from the pole in front of the fish hatchery, but the attempt failed and his gaze came hurrying home. Just back of his right shoulder was a casement window. The sash was pushed back, but a white muslin curtain repulsed all efforts to see beyond. He surmised that there was the kitchen wherein was concocted the distressingly unpleasant beverage which stood growing cold before him. He fancied he could hear



THE GOLDEN HEART



sounds through the window, sounds as of someone moving quietly about. But when he listened attentively all he heard was the tap-tap of Anton's hammer, the cry of a gull circling overhead, the low lapping of the water about the spiles, and the far-off shriek of a locomotive. He eyed the door wistfully; the view was beginning to pall. He glanced at his watch; it still lacked forty minutes of noon—and the ice-man. That would never do! His eyes fell on the tea-cup, still nearly full of luke-warm tea and floating lemon. He smiled and stole a look at the muslin curtain. For all he knew there might be eyes behind that curtain, but he would risk it. Very stealthily he raised the tea-cup, reached across the flower-box and—there was a tiny splash below. Then he replaced it in the saucer, assumed a composed attitude and cried "Shop, please!"

After an interval, such an interval as might be consumed in pulling down a shirt-waist at the back and in glancing hurriedly in a mirror, his call was answered. Natalie appeared at the doorway, tray in hand, her blue eyes viewing him quite composedly.

THE GOLDEN HEART

"Did you call?" she asked.

"Yes, thanks." Did he imagine it, or was there really somewhere about the face that looked at him from the shadow of the awning a lurking gleam of amusement? He wondered if she had seen his ruse. "May I have another cup of tea, please?"

"Certainly," she answered gravely, advancing to the little table. Paul watched her through his cigarette smoke. She took the lid from the teapot and glanced inside. "There's plenty here," she said. "And it's quite hot. These pots really hold enough for three small cups."

"Well, I don't want to seem finicky," replied Paul after a dubious look at the contents, "but I never did like tea that had stood. In fact," he added gravely, "I've been warned against it—by my physician."

"I thought," she remarked, "that you seldom drank tea."

"I don't as a rule. This is by doctor's orders. He's prescribed it for—my nerves."

This time the amusement was plainly apparent.

"What a funny remedy," she said.



THE GOLDEN HEART

"Doesn't one usually avoid tea for nervousness?"

"I believe so, Miss—did you tell me your name?"

"No."

"Oh—well, I was going to say that my doctor is a homeopath, and prescribes on the theory that like cures like. You see, tea produces nervousness——" He broke off and stood up. "Won't you sit down? It makes me feel so beastly impolite to have you standing."

"Thank you, no," she answered. "I will get your tea." She put her tray on the table and placed the teapot and cup and saucer on it. Paul, still standing, added the plate of wafers and the saucer of sliced lemon.

"It's awfully good tea," he declared enthusiastically.

"You don't care for the wafers or lemon?" she asked.

"Oh, I beg pardon! You might leave those, of course. Can I—may I carry that for you?"

"No, thank you. Does it look so heavy?"

"N-no——"



THE GOLDEN HEART

She started away.

"I—I don't suppose I could watch you make it?" he asked desperately.

"Visitors are not allowed in the kitchen," she replied with just the ghost of a smile from the doorway. Then she disappeared and Paul sat down again and thrust his hands into his pockets and whistled an air sadly out of tune. Presently he reached over and plucked a pale yellow nasturtium and slipped it into the lapel of his coat, viewing it approvingly from different angles. That smile had helped a lot!

Presently through the casement window came unmistakable sounds. Paul listened a moment, then arose and knocked on the ledge. After a moment,

"Well?" she called.

"If visitors aren't allowed in the kitchen is there any rule against looking in the window?"

An instant of silence, then light steps across the floor and a hand on the edge of the curtain.

"Visitors," said Natalie severely, "are not usually so interested in our culinary——"



THE GOLDEN HEART

Back went the curtain and she found herself facing him at the disturbing proximity of twenty inches. She drew back hurriedly.

"What a jolly little place," he said, placing his elbows on the ledge and gazing about him. It was a tiny room partitioned off in the corner of the building and served as a combined kitchen and pantry. There was a small gas-stove on a ledge, a sink nearby, cupboards and shelves against the walls, a doorway opposite the window and, at one side, a flight of narrow stairs leading to the floor above. "You don't live here, do you?" asked Paul.

"No, there are two rooms above, but they aren't occupied at present."

"Are they for rent?"

She shook her head.

"I asked because I've been sort of looking around for a place," he explained. "I'm at the hotel, but I really need a studio."

"You're an artist then?" she asked, measuring the tea into the pot.

"Blessed if I know! Sometimes I think I am and more often I'm pretty certain I'm not. Anyway, I paint."



THE GOLDEN HEART

"There are a good many here who do that."

"And who aren't artists?"

"Oh, I didn't mean that."

"It's so, though."

She poured the water into the pot and covered it with a cosey.

"It will be ready in a minute," she said.

"Oh, there's no hurry, Miss——"

But she made no attempt to aid him.

"You see, it's a little bit awkward not knowing your name," he said.

"Why should you? Do you usually ask the names of folks who wait on you in shops?"

"I would if I wanted to know."

"But you probably wouldn't learn, would you?"

She took up the tray and passed out through the door. Paul went back to the table.

"That sounded like a challenge," he said when she appeared on the balcony.

"I didn't intend it to," she replied indifferently. "Have you enough lemon?"

"Plenty," he answered significantly.



THE GOLDEN HEART



"Perhaps a little more sugar would help."
She looked innocently into the bowl.

"Surely you don't need more than a dozen pieces?"

"I can stand a lot of sugar," he replied, gazing fascinatedly at a sunbeam which, having stolen through a crevice in the awning, was boldly dancing in and out of her hair as she leaned above the table. Just so he had seen, in November, the sunlight washing the fallen beech leaves with pale gold. "You're not going?" he asked reproachfully as she moved away.

"Why, yes," she answered.

"I thought perhaps you'd tell me about this place," he said. "It must be very interesting, conducting a tea house."

"It's much like any other shop," she responded indifferently. "And there are things I must attend to. If you want anything please call."

When she had disappeared Paul dropped into the chair and stared moodily at the teapot. Finally he filled his cup and added lemon and sugar. But after a taste he set it down with a wry face.

THE GOLDEN HEART

"Beastly stuff," he muttered.

He lighted the last cigarette in his case, tucked the match snugly into the petunias and smoked discontentedly. The sun shone straight down on the canvas awning, the morning breeze had died away and the balcony began to be unpleasantly warm. He looked at his watch, and as he noted the time the bell in the tower of the town hall struck twelve clanging notes. He flicked the cigarette over the railing and called "Shop, please!"

"I wonder," he thought, as he put his hand into a pocket, "if it would be proper to add a tip. Somehow she doesn't look—er—tipable. Still, she must be running this place to make money, and so——"

His expression changed from anxiety to dismay. He arose in a panic, upsetting the chair, and went frantically through his pockets again. And he was still searching when Natalie came out.

"You called, didn't you?" she asked.

"I did," he replied, abandoning further search. "I wanted to settle my bill, but——"

"Seventy-five cents," she replied prompt-



THE GOLDEN HEART

ly. "Tea is thirty cents a pot and wafers are fifteen."

"Er—yes, I know, but—the fact is——" He paused, folded his arms across his chest and faced her gravely. "Miss—er—Miss Shop," he said, "please look me over attentively and tell me whether in your opinion I look honest."

"Why, of course!"

"Thank you." He sighed with relief. "Then when I tell you that I have just made the embarrassing discovery that my resources at hand are represented by four pennies and a soiled ferry ticket you will believe me?"

"Yes," answered Natalie soberly.

"Thank you again. I may have dropped my pocket-book somewhere, but I have a strong suspicion that I left it in my room at the hotel. It was a stupid thing to do, especially to-day. I have here, however, a watch, a chain, a cigar-cutter, a pencil and a knife. So far as I know they are all gold. You will be doing me a favor if you will accept them as security for my indebtedness. I will to-morrow or this afternoon,



THE GOLDEN HEART

if you like—exchange coin of the realm for them. I would present you with my card, Miss Shop, but unfortunately my cards are in the reprehensible pocket-book.”

Natalie drew back from the proffered articles with a little laugh.

“But how absurd,” she said. “You may send me the money whenever you like. I wouldn’t think of taking your watch. It doesn’t matter a bit, really.”

“That’s good of you. You almost restore my self-respect. At least you will let me give you my name and address?”

“If you wish, although it’s not necessary. You can just drop the money into an envelope and mail it, you know.”

“Very well. And the address is?”

“I’ll give you a card,” murmured Natalie. He followed her into the shop and she took a card from a little sweet-grass tray and handed it to him.

“Thank you,” he said. He tucked it into a pocket. “I’ll send the money not later than to-morrow. Perhaps I’d better bring it, though. You see, I’d be certain then that you had it.”



THE GOLDEN HEART

"I could send you a receipt if you wish," she responded.

"I wouldn't trouble you to do that. I shall be over this way painting to-morrow and I'll just stop and leave it. Good morning."

"Good morning," answered Natalie politely.

He made his departure in good order, congratulating himself on having carried off an unpleasant situation rather well. He made his way down the steps, untied the skiff, doffed his coat and took up the oars, heading his craft straight across the harbor. As he came in view of the balcony he looked toward it hopefully, but it was empty. At that moment a yellow wagon stopped under the swinging sign. Paul smiled.

"The ice-man at last," he murmured. "I don't see, though, why she needs ice; she's frigid enough as it is. She's mighty pretty, though, and awfully attractive. I wonder who she really is and what her name is."

Then he remembered the card and finally found it crumpled away in his coat pocket.



THE GOLDEN HEART

He smoothed it out and read it, resting on
his oars.

AT THE SIGN OF THE GOLDEN HEART

TEA HOUSE AND GIFT SHOP

Shore Road, Rockhaven Neck

Hand-Made Jewelry

Pottery—Baskets—Books

Art Leather and Metal

Post Cards and Souvenirs

Orders taken for menu and place cards

Miss Curtis

Telephone: Rockhaven 126-L



IV.

EVEN the most equable of us are affected by weather conditions. A dark rainy day makes us dull and depressed; sends us wandering from one room to another, picking up book after book only to discard it and wonder how writers whom we have hitherto held in some respect can be so dull and inane; makes letter-writing seem so onerous a duty that we hustle unanswered correspondence out of sight and long for the day when every house will have its wireless telephone and pens will be of interest only to collectors of antiques; makes the very thought of work distasteful. I wonder if a masterpiece has ever been evolved on a rainy day; a great poem or picture or drama or story. I doubt it.

The next day the sun shines radiantly, and, perhaps, there is a nip in the air. How we can work then! And after work is done out come the hated letters and we write pages and pages in reply. And later still we



THE GOLDEN HEART

take up the discarded book again and find that it is just the sort of book we like best in all the world of books! Well, I suppose—claiming no originality for the theory—that it is a surviving trait. Doubtless in the first ages, when we hung gracefully by our tails from the branches, we sulked and snarled and gibbered and chattered simian oaths when the weather kept us wrapped to our own palm tree, and made an awful fuss when a depleted larder rendered necessary an expedition in search of peanuts or popcorn, or whatever it was we subsisted on in those pre-dietetic times.

Yes, the weather is responsible for our moods to a greater extent than we realize, but the pendulum swings the other way as well and we are often responsible for the weather—to all intents and purposes. For since we lost our caudal appendages we have developed, among other things, what we call imagination. In the tree-top age this power wasn't ours, and when it rained then it *rained*, and there was no two ways about it. But nowadays, given the proper mood and a normal amount of imagination,



THE GOLDEN HEART

a rainy day may be anything we please to have it!

“Do you remember,” we ask, thinking of some recent yesterday or some yesterday in the Blessed Long-Ago, “what a day that was? The sky was never so blue, the sun never so bright, the air never so soft! Do you remember how we leaned on the wall of the little stone bridge and watched the water flow rippling below us through the arch? Do you remember how the birds sang along the banks and broke the crystal surface with their wings as they darted low? There wasn’t a cloud in the world that glorious, perfect day!”

But hand touched hand and hearts were singing that day, and so we will never believe that clouds hid the sun for more than half the time, that a nasty chilly little wind blew dust in our eyes, and that the river was a very muddy little river indeed! All of which shows that if we have exchanged our tails for imagination we are just as well off.

A long and tiresome introduction this for the statement of a simple fact, the fact being that on the following day Paul Merritt



THE GOLDEN HEART

rowed across the harbor in the teeth of a threatening south-east wind and was convinced in his heart that it was absolutely the most perfect day of the summer. The wind had shifted in the night and this morning the wail of the whistle-buoy, half a mile off Popple Head, was plainly heard. Overhead dull and leaden clouds raced. Now and then a glimpse of blue showed through, but only for a moment. Little squalls of rain came pelting across the harbor and passed on. And Paul whistled a tuneless tune and pulled happily at the oars.

There was no sign of life about The Golden Heart and the door onto the balcony was closed tight. The nasturtium vines were swaying in the wind and the blossoms looked like bedraggled butterflies. Perhaps, he reflected as he nosed the skiff against the water-steps, she had not come yet. But the thought didn't trouble him. He was ready to spend an hour or so sitting on the front step if necessary. As he reached the level a big close-curtained touring car stood under the swinging sign, and while he made his way to the road through the wet grass it



THE GOLDEN HEART

started into life with a rasping of gears and panted away with the wind bellying its curtains.

“Early customers,” thought Paul. “I’m glad they’ve gone.”

The front door was open and he passed through the gate and along the short path with all the righteous assurance of a man on his way to settle a bill, making certain for the tenth time that he actually had the money in his pocket. There was no sunlight to blind him to-day and he saw her as he hesitated on the threshold. She had on a dark skirt this morning and a white waist, and the waist, although I doubt if Paul noted it, was a very fascinating waist indeed. And I may add that it did *not* wrinkle across the shoulders. I find it difficult to believe that anyone could walk the length of the path and reach the doorway without being discerned by Natalie, and yet when she looked up from the flowers she was arranging in the big copper bowl she was plainly surprised.

“Good morning,” said Paul. “May I come in, Miss Curtis?”



THE GOLDEN HEART

There was just a flicker of mischief and amusement in her eyes as she returned the greeting.

"I've come to settle up," he explained, taking his pocket-book out and selecting a note. "I felt like an awful fool yesterday, you know."

"You need not have. You're not the first person who has come here without their purse. Oh, but I can't change that!"

"Really? I'm sorry. If I'd thought I'd had it changed at the hotel." He looked perplexedly at the twenty-dollar bill. "Perhaps I can get it changed around here somewhere?" he asked hopefully.

"I'm afraid not," she laughed. "There's a little store at the Square, but that's a mile away, and, besides, I'm pretty sure they'd view a bill of that size with grave suspicion. I'm afraid you'll have to send it to me after all."

"But that isn't fair," he answered. "I can't stay in your debt any longer. You keep the bill and some day I'll stop and get the change."

"But that wouldn't be right either. Are



THE GOLDEN HEART

you quite sure you haven't seventy-five cents with you?"

"Quite," he answered promptly. It wasn't incumbent on him to explain that he had purposely emptied his pockets of change before leaving his room. "I tell you what I might do, though. I might open an account here. Suppose you credit me with nineteen dollars and twenty-five cents, Miss Curtis, and I'll take it out in tea and wafers. I think that's a rather clever idea."

"No, for by that time you'd be a nervous wreck, and I should feel that I was responsible, Mister——"

She floundered, looking charmingly embarrassed, and Paul smiled wickedly.

"I think you ought to know my name if it's going down on the books," he said.

"It's not necessary," she answered coldly, wondering if she had blushed, fearing that she had.

"N-no, I suppose you could call me Mr. Customer." She had to smile a little at that. "But my real name is Merritt. And there are some who say that the only merit in my pictures is the signature. The pun



THE GOLDEN HEART

isn't mine, Miss Curtis, so don't blame me, please."

"It's rather too obvious a pun to be clever, don't you think? But please take this money, Mr. Merritt, and pay me some other time."

"Then you refuse to open an account with me?"

"We have no accounts, Mr. Merritt."

"We? Then you aren't alone here?"

"There is another—person interested with me," she answered.

"Well——" He replaced the bill. "I suppose I shall have to beg an extension of credit then. I dare say it was stupid of me to come here with nothing smaller than a twenty."

She turned toward the copper bowl and the sweet-peas beside it.

"No, I wouldn't call it stupidity," she said quietly. He pondered that a moment, studying the back of her head and what was visible of one smooth cheek. It sounded rather—well, rather as though she suspected him of duplicity!

"Thank you," he murmured. "May I look around?"



THE GOLDEN HEART



“Certainly; this is a shop, you know. You’ll excuse me if I fix these flowers? You’ll find the price on everything.”

Paul began an interested examination of art pottery. It was very still and cosey and fragrant in here. In the corners the shadows lay heavy, but Natalie had drawn the curtains back at the windows and the gray light glimmered wanly on metal bowls and trays, on the brass trimmings of the old high-boy, on the gilded frames about the walls and diffused over the room a pleasant twilight. Paul moved on to the post-card table. One can spend a lot of time looking at post-cards, and this customer was in no hurry. Once Natalie stole a glance toward him and, finding him absorbed and apparently forgetful of her presence, examined him covertly but quite at leisure. Afterwards she smiled gently at the sweet-peas as though they shared a secret with her.

“I’d like very much to buy some of these cards,” said Paul breaking the silence at last, “but I’ll wait until I can pay for them.”

“Your credit is good, Mr. Merritt,” replied Natalie.

THE GOLDEN HEART

"I shan't risk damaging it," he laughed. A flurry of rain beat across the road and the garden and pelted in at the door and then passed over to hurry across the harbor in the wake of its companions. "I suppose you can't expect much business a day like this," he said. There was a slat-back chair beside him and he settled himself into it in quite the most natural way in the world.

"No," she replied, "although one day during a storm a party of folks in an automobile stopped to get out of the rain and very nearly exhausted our stock of goods." She moved a portfolio of prints aside on the chest under the window and seated herself. "I'm afraid this means a two-day's storm."

"That will be jolly," he said contentedly bringing his cigarette case out from force of habit and slipping it away again.

"You may if you wish," said Natalie smilingly.

"May——"

"Smoke. I know you want to."

"Really, no," answered Paul politely. But a minute later he was puffing away with every evidence of relish.



THE GOLDEN HEART

"Do you mean that you like rainy days?" asked Natalie.

"Well, that depends, Miss Curtis; on where you are and who you are with, you know. I can imagine being blissfully happy on a rainy day." He settled himself as comfortably as the uncompromising chair allowed and glanced at the leaden clouds through a window. "Let it rain," he murmured. Natalie suppressed a smile.

"I suppose it does depend," she agreed. "We haven't had much rain so far this summer."

"The weather has been wonderful since I've been here," said Paul. "I shan't mind a few days of rain. You can get some mighty good effects on rainy days and gray days like this. Things soften down and the distances melt together, and there's a—a smokiness that is infernally hard to get but is great when you do get it. There are some fine bits along the wharves over there on a misty day."

"Shouldn't you be at work then?" she asked with a smile.

"N-no, something told me not to work to-day."



THE GOLDEN HEART

"Perhaps it was laziness?"

"I'm afraid you don't know painters very well, Miss Curtis. Painters are never lazy. It may *look* like laziness sometimes, but it is only the artistic temperament."

"How convenient! Do you have it, Mr. Merritt?"

"I'm afraid so. And it usually comes at the worst possible times. If I start a thing to-day and must finish it to-morrow before conditions change, why, when to-morrow comes the artistic temperament is something awful! I don't want to get out of bed in the morning, I hate to leave the breakfast table, I dawdle over the paper and invent every excuse I can think of to keep away from work. When it doesn't much matter whether I work or loaf laz—I mean the artistic temperament doesn't bother me. I don't know why it is."

"Have you done much work so far?" asked Natalie.

"I've spoiled a lot of perfectly good canvas with a lot of perfectly good paint, but the net result isn't encouraging, Miss Curtis. I've worn out one palette knife already



THE GOLDEN HEART

scraping. And the deuce of it is, you know ——” He stopped and frowned at his cigarette.

“What *is* the deuce of it?” she asked presently.

“Why, you see—— But it’s rather a long story, and I don’t see why I should bore you with it.”

“But I like stories on a rainy day.”

“Do you? Really?” He walked across and tossed his cigarette through the window. Then he lifted the portfolio from the end of the chest and took its place, clasping his hands around one knee and facing her. “I’m afraid, though, this isn’t a very interesting story. In fact, it’s a good deal of a joke—and I guess the joke’s on me. You see, Miss Curtis, I’ve always had the painting bee in my bonnet, ever since I was a kid. I used to draw pictures on the blank leaves of my school books with colored crayons instead of getting my lessons, and afterwards, at college, I was worse; took Fine Arts, read everything I could find and drew for the Lampoon. That was all right enough and folks at home were quite tickled



THE GOLDEN HEART

about it. But when I graduated and insisted on going to Paris to study dad had a fit. You see he's a business man first, last, and all the time; contracting's his line; office buildings and that sort of thing; Blythe, Merritt and Carter's the firm name; it's pretty well known around New York."

Natalie nodded. "I think I've heard it," she said.

"Well, dad was all for having me go into the office and learn the business. The business is all right, too; rather interesting. But I thought I wanted to be an artist."

"And don't you now?"

"I don't quite know, Miss Curtis. If I thought I'd ever make good at it I'd like nothing better, but I don't believe I ever would. Well, anyhow, dad and I had a bit of a rumpus. He's a bully old codger, dad is, but I guess I've spoiled him a bit. The upshot was that I went to Paris minus the parental blessing. That is, minus dad's share of it. My mother took my part, just as mothers generally do, I guess. I was in Paris three years; got back last



THE GOLDEN HEART

winter. I learned more or less, I suppose. The trouble was I had too much money; I fancy it would have been a good deal better if dad had held up the allowance with his blessing. I fooled away a good deal of time. Still, I did study—with Labbé and MacNair and Dulaon. But every one of them works differently and now sometimes I think what I do represents the worst of each. Well, when I came home dad and I had it again. Dad likes good pictures; fact is, I'm rather proud of his taste in that direction; but he isn't crazy over having an artist in the Merritt family. We compromised at last. 'I'll give you until Fall,' said dad. 'You go where you want to and paint all you want to and if you can sell a picture by the first of October I won't say another word. If you can't you come back here and go into the office and learn a business that will do you some good.' Well, I took him up on the proposition. After all, it was fair enough. If I can't do anything decent this summer it will prove pretty conclusively that I've been wasting time."



THE GOLDEN HEART

"But isn't it hard to sell pictures in the summer?" asked Natalie doubtfully.

"Beastly, so they say. Battle—you know him, I dare say; you have one of his things over there—has a theory that the only time people buy paintings is in the Spring. He says when house-cleaning time comes around they change the worsted mottos and the engraving of Washington Crossing the Delaware and find they've got a bare space on the wall. Then they go out and buy the first thing they see."

"How silly!" laughed Natalie.

"Well, you can't prove it by me. I never sold but one picture in my life. That was in Holland one summer. I was making a sketch of a fishing-boat at Vollondam when a tall lanky American came along and stopped behind me. I fancy he was a Cook's who had wandered away from the fold. Finally he asked how much the sketch was worth. I told him it wasn't finished and he said he didn't care; he liked it just as it was and what would I take for it. I recall that the prospect of selling a picture made me quite excited. I started



THE GOLDEN HEART



to say ten dollars and then feared he wouldn't pay that much. So I said five. 'I'll take it,' he said, and I handed it over. 'But you haven't signed,' said he. So I wrote something in the corner; I think it was 'William Smith'; and he went off holding the wet board at arm's length as proud as you please. I've got that five yet."

"But it doesn't seem quite fair," said Natalie, "to say that you must sell a picture before October. Have you done anything yet?"

"Salable?" he laughed. "I should say not!"

"But you ought to; you ought to send something to a dealer right away, Why, it's almost the first of July now!"

"Yes, time's getting on. It's remarkable how time *can* get on when you don't want it to, and how it can balk and hold back when you do, isn't it?"

"Are you quite certain there isn't anything that might sell, Mr. Merritt? Because—if there was—a good many people see the pictures here, you know, and sometimes they buy. Last summer we sold

THE GOLDEN HEART

several. I thought perhaps you'd like to put one here and see if we couldn't sell it for you."

"That's awfully good of you, Miss Curtis, but there isn't a thing I'd want anyone to see. But, I tell you; there's going to be. I'm going to do this place from the harbor back there. It'll make a bully little thing; about nine o'clock, say, while the shadows are long and the sun's on the other side. The water's like bottle-glass and the spillings are draped with green sea-moss, and the awning gives a jolly dash of color; that and the nasturtiums, you know."

"Just the thing!" cried Natalie. "It's just what people like to buy; something with water in it and a house or a boat and some flowers and lots of color. I—I think I'd like to buy it myself."

"It wouldn't be for sale to you, Miss Curtis, but if you'll just accept it as—as a gift—"

"Thank you, but I couldn't do that. But I'm sure I could sell it, Mr. Merritt. You will do it, won't you?"

"To-morrow morning promptly at nine



THE GOLDEN HEART

o'clock my cruiser will drop anchor and, if you will deign to look out, you'll see me hard at work—that is, if it's a good day. I want sunshine and clear light for that. I wish, though—"

"Yes?"

"I wish you'd take it when it's done, Miss Curtis."

"But I—why, I—couldn't, Mr. Merritt!"

"I know. You're not allowed to accept expensive presents from gentleman," said Paul with a laugh. "All right. I'll do it just the same. And maybe when you see it you'll be glad you don't have to take it."

"That's horrid! I'm sure it's going to be lovely, Mr. Merritt."

"I wish we might form a painting partnership, Miss Curtis; I to supply the work and you the enthusiasm."

"I ought to tell you that we get a commission when we sell a picture," said Natalie in her best business manner.

"I should hope so! If you sold one of mine I'd feel like a robber if you didn't keep the whole sum. What's that?"

It was the town hall clock striking



THE GOLDEN HEART

twelve, its notes mingling with the wail of the whistle-buoy.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Paul. He looked at his watch.

"It's never *twelve!*" said Natalie.

"It really is, Miss Curtis. By Jove, I owe you an apology for taking the whole morning."

"It doesn't matter," murmured Natalie. "There—there was nothing to do, you see."

"But I had no idea I was—was—I had no idea it was so late. And I haven't had my tea!"

"And the doctor would be so angry, wouldn't he?" asked Natalie. They laughed at that, and then Paul put out his hand and Natalie laid hers in it, quite as though they had been doing that sort of thing for months. Which shows how a rainy day may be used to advantage by sensible people.

After he had gone Natalie went into the little kitchen and made her tea and prepared her luncheon, singing all the while as though the dark clouds weren't racing overhead and the rain-squalls pelting the gray-green harbor. And when the repast was



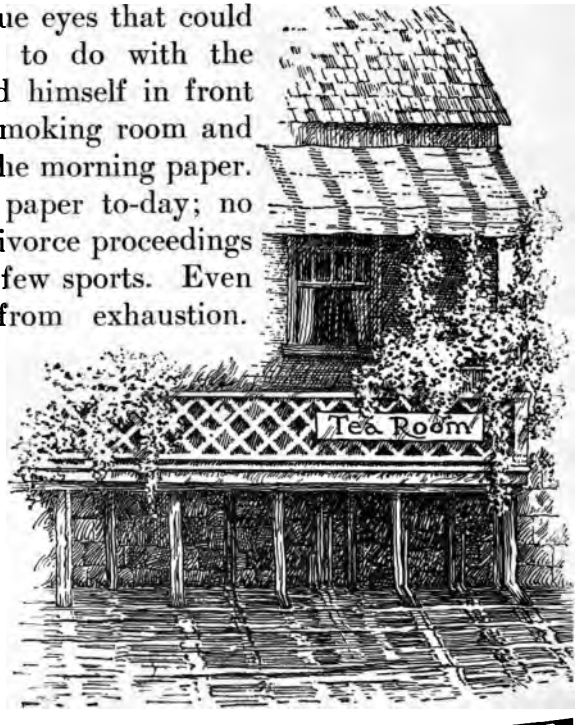
THE GOLDEN HEART

ready she sat down beside the little table with crossed knees and swung one silken ankle in time to the tune she was still humming and forgot to nibble or sip for long minutes at a time. You see, Dear Reader, I was right. One may be very contented, even very happy, on a rainy day.



V.

BUT when Paul awoke the following morning and found that the rain, which had pattered down all night, was still at it he growled impatiently. After breakfast he tramped for awhile around the big veranda, frequently gazing across the harbor toward the little tea house seen indistinctly through the gray gloom. He was rather disconsolate, withal. Of course it was only because he had set his heart on beginning the painting of the Golden Heart this morning and couldn't. Nothing more than that, certainly, even if his thoughts did dwell a good deal on a pair of very blue eyes that could have absolutely nothing to do with the picture. Later he settled himself in front of the wood fire in the smoking room and strove to find interest in the morning paper. But it was a very dull paper to-day; no murders of moment, no divorce proceedings in the millionaire circles, few sports. Even politics was suffering from exhaustion.



THE GOLDEN HEART

Presently he yawned and fell to studying the painted panels which encircled the walls of the little room. Most of them bore well-known signatures; Battle was represented by a bold sketch of the sand dunes, of which he was so fond, in strong sunlight and purple shadows; Crawford—he had died two summers before in his little white studio overhanging the water a mile away—had done a typical wharf scene, the masts and rigging filling the upper part of the panel with confusing lines and streaks so that one had to back clear across the room to get the proper perspective. And there were a dozen others, one a hazardous view of the harbor from the hill on the Neck with all the elementary colors slapped on with a big brush and the whole filled with crisp Autumn sunlight. That was Paul's favorite because of its very daring. It was barbaric in its coloring and made the panels on either side look weak and faded.

Later Paul found a discarded novel in the hall and stretched himself out on the window-seat with half a dozen pillows placed under his shoulders and read. But the hero



THE GOLDEN HEART

was an impossible American, the heroine an imperial nonentity, and the scene an improbable kingdom where people spoke French constructed on the lines of newspaper English. Finally,

"I don't care a fig whether he marries the Princess or not," sighed Paul, tossing the book down. "It would serve them perfectly right, though, if they were married. They'd bore each other to death in a fortnight. I wonder why our bright young novelists have to lay their stories in imaginary places on the other side of the world. What's the matter with this little old country? I'll bet if I could write stories I wouldn't have to go further away than Rockhaven for my locale. It would be rather fun to write a novel. I wonder how you do it. I suppose you find a hero first and then a heroine and then you add a half-dozen other folks to interfere and mess things up for three-fourths of the yarn. And of course you must have a plot. I guess it's the plot that would floor me."

He swung his arms up over his head and settled more comfortably among the pillows.



THE GOLDEN HEART



A youth in a checked Norfolk and a girl in white serge came to the door, viewed the window-seat disappointedly, and wandered away again trying to look unconcerned. Paul grinned.

"You'll have to find some other place to spoon," he muttered, "this seat's engaged. Now let's see about this novel. First, the Hero. Hum; well, what's the matter with me? I'll bet I'd make a dandy hero! Then the Heroine." His gaze wandered across the harbor. "She must have blue eyes, of course; every heroine ought to have blue eyes; I believe they always do, too. She would be rather tall and slim with lightish hair—I wonder how you'd mix that color. Well, anyhow, lightish hair, and it would be sort of—sort of fluffy—no, not fluffy; sort of—hanged if I know; I'll have to look that up in a dictionary. And there'd be a near-dimple in the chin and a lot of little golden-russet freckles over her dear little nose. And she'd have a voice like—like a golden bell—— My, but I ought to make a note of that! That's bully! I wonder, though, what a golden bell sounds like.

THE GOLDEN HEART

Well, so much for the Hero and the Heroine. Now for the chorus, the merry, mer—— But why have any others in the story? They'd just get in the way and mix me up. Two's plenty, anyway.

Four is better far than three;
Better still is two, dear,
When of that one unit's me
And the other's you, dear.

“Now for the plot. Impecunious young painter chap—— There's a snag first thing; dad'll have to lose his money somehow; Wall Street, I suppose; speculation in stocks and that sort of thing; I'll write to him about it. Impecunious young Hero falls in love with beautiful and likewise impecunious Heroine who supports widowed father—I mean mother—by conducting a tea house. Hm; then what? Too poor to marry! That's it, of course. Hero has only his wonderful talent and Heroine her marvelous beauty. Of course you can't keep house on talent and beauty. Hero and Heroine languish through twenty chapters. Great Scott, that's a big order! I guess we'll make it ten chapters; the reader's



THE GOLDEN HEART

interest would languish too, I guess. We'll shorten this novel to a novelette. Then—let me see. Ah! Hero paints Heroine's picture; imaginative thing; figure in white poised on a hillside against sea and sky; 'Spirit of Summer' or something like that; slathers of ultramarine in the background and a seagull overhead. Bully idea that, too! Well, anyhow, Hero sends picture to Salon—no, National Academy and it becomes famous; likewise Hero. Pittsburg millionaire buys it for two thousand dollars—That won't do; you can't start housekeeping on two thousand dollars; better make it five; it's only a novel, after all. Of course picture wins a good big prize, too; that ought to help some; furnish the parlor or pay for the wedding trip, perhaps. Hero weds Heroine and they're happy ever—Hello, Battle!"

The newcomer, a big bewhiskered man in yellow oilskins and a dripping, battered straw hat, leaned his canvases against the wall and tossed his paint-box on to a chair. Then he hung the hat over the top of the poker to dry and slipped out of his oilskins.



THE GOLDEN HEART

"Hello, boy," he answered in a big, rumbling bass. "Why aren't you at work?"

"I have the artistic temperament to-day," replied Paul with a yawn. "Besides, look at the condemned weather."

"Weather won't hurt you," said Battle, punching the bell button. "Besides, you don't have to stay out in it."

"Rather looks as though you had stayed out in it!"

"No, I got a little damp coming home. I've been sitting quite dry and comfortable under a shed down on a fish wharf."

"I thought I detected a subtle odor as you came in. I thought at first it was oriza, but I realize now that it is merely dried cod-fish." Battle grunted and unstrapped his canvases, placing one on a chair and quartered to the big window.

"How's it look?" he asked. Paul slid his feet down, sat up and viewed it.

"Good," he answered, "mighty good, Battle. I wish I knew a tenth of what you do about composition."

"I never think of it," answered Battle simply. "You belong to the Worry School,



THE GOLDEN HEART

Merritt; you're one of these chaps who work a picture out on paper first with a pair of dividers. I was taught to observe two or three elementary rules of composition and not trouble beyond that. I guess you chaps have us beaten on science but—I don't know; a few of us Old School codgers still hang on; and now and then we sell."

He turned to Paul with a merry, good-natured twinkle in his brown eyes.

"I should say you did! But don't class me with the Worry School, as you call it. Love you, man, I never know when I set my easel up whether I'm going to do this, that or the other thing!"

"Just as well. There's Gallivan"—— He was interrupted by the appearance of a bell-boy. "Have a hot Scotch, Merritt?" Paul shook his head. "Bring one then, boy. And you tell them down there that if it isn't hot enough to burn my tongue I'll come and wipe my palette on them." The boy went off grinning and Battle sat down and filled his pipe, prodding the tobacco down with broad paint-stained fingers. "There's Gallivan," he continued; "Gallivan goes out



THE GOLDEN HEART

and sits down and looks at his subject; spends the day, maybe. Then he draws it all out on paper the size of his canvas. Sometimes he redraws it a dozen times. Then he goes out and paints it. All right; but look at his things. You can see with half an eye that if the Lord had placed this tree or that rock a foot one way or the other Gallivan would never have forgiven him."

"I wish I could do half as good work," sighed Paul.

"You never will, though, boy. Gallivan starved for twenty years. When a man does that and lives through it you can't beat him."

"I guess that's so, Battle. By the way, I saw a picture of yours yesterday over across the harbor in that little tea house."

"Yes, I put it there. She's a nice little woman, and I never could refuse a nice little woman. She's never sold anything of mine yet, though. Folks go there for two dollar trinkets."

"She told me she sold several pictures last summer."

"That so? She's back then, eh?"



THE GOLDEN HEART

“Back?”

“Yes; I heard she’d gone away; some relative ill, I think.”

“She was there yesterday,” said Paul. “Rather a charming girl, I thought.” Battle puckered his forehead and rubbed the bowl of his pipe reflectively against his nose.

“We-ell, yes, I suppose so. Nice little woman, anyway. Deserves all she gets, I guess; has rather a hard time of it.”

“Do you mean that she’s—poor?”

“Poor as a church mouse, I suppose. There’s another woman with her, a Miss—I’ve forgotten her name; lives over—— Ah!” The boy appeared with the steaming toddy and Battle signed the check, bestowed a tip and sipped approvingly. Paul tried to reconcile what the other had said with the girl’s appearance. Somehow she hadn’t suggested poverty to him; he recalled a brief glimpse of a silk-clad ankle and had a notion that the rest of her attire had been in accordance. Well, it was hard to tell nowadays the condition of a person’s purse by their attire. Battle, with glass in one hand



THE GOLDEN HEART

and pipe in the other, was examining his picture with half-closed eyes.

"That further boat's out of drawing," he muttered, waving his pipe at it. "I can fix that, though, in a minute. I guess I'll go back this afternoon before the rain stops and pull it together a bit. You'd better come along, Merritt. Lots of good stuff down that way."

"Thanks. I guess I will. To-morrow, if it's fair, I want to try that tea house from the water side. It's a rather charming bit."

"H'm," murmured Battle. "'Rather charming girl; rather charming bit'; which is it, girl or bit you're after?"

"Go to the deuce," answered Paul good-humoredly.

"I'd rather go to lunch," said Battle. "Wait till I get some of the marks of honest toil off my hands and I'll go in with you. Painting in the rain always makes me hungry; thirsty, too." He drained his glass. "Have another, friend Battle. No, thank you, gentlemen; I am rich but abstemious. I won't be a minute, Merritt."



VI.

COATLESS and hatless Paul sat in his dory, with canvas propped up on the seat in front of him and painted. It was a wonderful morning and the conditions were just as he wanted them; the water was glassy-green in the foreground, the spiles were hung with vivid moss, deep shadows huddled under the little building, the sea wall, lichened above and barnacled below, held all sorts of gray and green and pink tones, the sunlight was golden beyond the house and the gnarled apple trees, the nasturtiums shone like yellow and vermillion flames along the balcony, the striped awning added a picturesque foreign touch and the weathered gable was like shadowed silver. And yet in spite of all this the work was going but slowly. This was the third day of it, however, and the picture was nearing completion, and perhaps that accounted for the half-hearted way in which Paul plied his brush. Or it may have been that in watch-



THE GOLDEN HEART

ing the door onto the balcony so attentively he rather lost sight of the rest of his subject. You see, it was after ten o'clock—he looked at his watch to make certain—and she hadn't appeared on the balcony once. If it hadn't been for the fact that the door was open he would have thought she hadn't come yet. But that door was positive proof that she was somewhere within those walls and Paul wished that he had decided on an interior. He rumpled his hair and frowned at the canvas. Then he deepened a shadow here and there and finally laid down his brush and lighted a cigarette.

It was very unkind of her to act this way, very heartless. He needed encouragement. Yesterday and the day before there had been occasional interchanges of civilities between balcony and boat, and afterwards the painting had been carried ashore and set up in the shop and discussed and everything had been quite pleasant and friendly. Of course it might be that she was busy with a stray customer or two, but customers came usually in automobiles or carriages and Paul hadn't seen any. More probably,



THE GOLDEN HEART



however, she was tired of his chatter and her non-appearance was intended as a hint that for to-day she didn't want to be bothered with him or his picture. Well, that could be arranged. He would simply row back to the hotel. The thing was done, anyway, as far as he could see, and a pretty poor looking thing it was. Yesterday they had both been quite enthusiastic about it, but this morning he couldn't find a single redeeming feature in it. The colors looked raw, the composition commonplace, the brush-work appallingly amateurish. Evidently he had ruined it by the morning's work. And it was her fault. He was going home, and when he got there he would scrape every bit of paint off the canvas. Perhaps she would ask him about it some day and he would tell her and she'd be a little bit sorry.

He was sick of painting, anyway. What was the use of his frittering his time away doing poorly what so many others did well? Besides, even if he did make a success, he was lessening the chances of a lot of decent fellows who were really dependent on paint-

THE GOLDEN HEART

ing for their bread and butter. Dad was right; the office was the place for him. He'd chuck the whole thing right now and go back to-morrow. Only—well, New York wasn't a nice place in summer, and—he scowled resentfully at the tea house—it didn't hold Her. Of course she wasn't really anything to him; she interested him and he liked to look at her and hear her talk and watch the smiles come and go and—and be near her. That was all. Besides, his father had given him until the first of October, there wasn't a great deal doing in the office in summer, he supposed, and on the whole he guessed he would stick it out a while longer. For one thing, he'd like to finish the canvas he had started three days before when he had painted with Battle under the fish shed. That really wasn't so bad.

Meanwhile, however, he was going home. It was hot—or it would be soon; the picture was about finished; he had a lot of paint under his thumb-nail; the water was getting glarey and hurt his eyes and he *thought* he was getting a headache. He couldn't remember ever having had a headache, but



THE GOLDEN HEART

he was pretty certain that he was experiencing premonitory symptoms. He stowed his brushes away and closed his box, laid his canvas out of the way, and tugged at his anchor rope. And just then something impelled his eyes toward the tea house, and there, leaning over the balcony rail, framed in the green vines, was a figure in white.

"Good morning," she called.

"Good afternoon," replied Paul with a wealth of sarcasm.

"How are you getting on? Isn't it most finished? I'm dying to see it!"

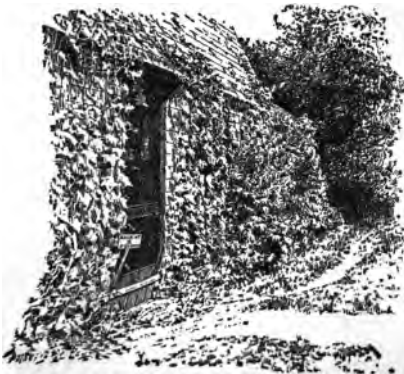
But he didn't intend to be placated as easily as all that.

"It's done, but it's about as bad as it could be. Where—where have you been all the morning?"

"All the morning?" she laughed. "It's only a little after ten, Mr. Merritt. I've been right here, of course."

"I didn't see you," he said a trifle resentfully.

"Oh, but I didn't want to bother you. I thought you'd get on much better without interruptions."



THE GOLDEN HEART

"Well, I didn't. I fancy I've spoiled it."

"Hold it up and let me see," she commanded. But Paul shook his head.

"I'll bring it in to you," he answered. He pulled up the piece of pig-iron which did duty as an anchor and seized the oars cheerfully. Life suddenly looked much brighter.

"I don't believe you've spoiled it," she said as he approached the end of the balcony. "You couldn't, you know."

"If I have," he replied, attempting moroseness but making poor work of it, "it's your fault, Miss Curtis."

"My fault!" she said incredulously, as she peered down at him through the vines. "Why, what do you mean?" Paul let the oars trail a moment and looked his fill. Then,

"I missed you," he said softly. The laughter disappeared from her face and she drew back a little so that the vines half hid her.

"That's nonsense," she said soberly. "Please let me see it, Mr. Merritt."

"There's no nonsense about it," he said doggedly as he dipped his oars again.



THE GOLDEN HEART

"You've almost spoiled it." He tied his skiff at the steps and bore the wet canvas into the house and set it against a chair just inside the door. There was restraint in the air until they had each backed away to view the picture and Natalie had given a little delighted "O-oh." Paul viewed it doubtfully.

"What do you think?" he asked anxiously.

"I think it's perfectly dear!"

"Really?" He put his head on one side and the other. "Well, it doesn't look so bad in here, after all," he said with a sigh of relief.

"Bad! It's charming, Mr. Merritt! I think you've done wonderfully. Why did you say you had spoiled it?" she asked accusingly.

"I—thought I had. It looked pretty poor out there."

"But you like it now, don't you?" she demanded.

"If you do," he replied with a smile.

"But don't you really?"

"Why, yes, I rather think I do. There are one or two things that might be done yet——"



THE GOLDEN HEART

"No, no, you mustn't touch it, Mr. Merritt! Really and truly you mustn't! You'll—fuddle it if you do. I don't believe there is really any such word as fuddle," she laughed, "but it's what I mean. Please say you won't touch it again."

That's one of the hardest promises a painter can make, and Paul may be excused for hesitating a moment. And he may be as readily excused for promising the very instant he looked up and encountered those blue eyes fixed on him appealingly.

"All right," he said, "I promise, although——"

"No, there is no 'although' about it," she declared imperiously. "It's quite perfect as it is. You're to let it stay right here, Mr. Merritt. You can measure it and bring the frame over from town. I don't dare even let you take it away."

"You evidently don't think much of my promises," he laughed.

"Oh, yes, I do, but you'd perhaps compromise on your conscience; I've done that myself and know how easy it is; and I shan't risk it."



THE GOLDEN HEART



"All right, Miss Curtis. I'll measure it now if you have a rule or a tape or something."

But after a search about the premises Natalie had to confess that nothing of the sort was to be found. Paul accepted the situation very cheerfully.

"I'll bring one over to-morrow," he said.

"But you could get the size with a piece of string, couldn't you?"

"Er—that's risky. String stretches so, you know. I'd better bring a foot rule with me. May I put this up here out of the way? You might brush your skirt against it."

"Please do. What shall you call it?"

"The Golden Heart,' I suppose. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps, although pictures like that are usually called 'Early Morning' or 'Morning Sunlight' or something like that, aren't they?"

"I believe they are, but this is called 'The Golden Heart,'" he said decisively. "It'll make folks ask questions, and that always helps."

"And how much shall we ask for it?"

THE GOLDEN HEART

That "we" produced a delightful sensation of warmth about his heart until he realized that he wasn't included in it.

"Oh, I suppose forty or fifty dollars," he said uninterestedly.

"Forty or fifty, Mr. Merritt! Why, that's absurd! It should be eighty at least, and I don't think a hundred would be too much."

"Don't you? That seems a lot of money for a small painting."

"But it isn't small! And Mr. Battle asks a hundred and twenty for that one of his."

"Yes, but Battle's known and I'm not. Let's compromise on seventy-five, Miss Curtis. How much will that give you?"

"Fifteen dollars, but I wasn't thinking about our commission at all, really. I was only thinking that if we did sell it it would be nice to get a good price for it if only on your father's account. You see, Mr. Merritt, if you sold it too cheap he might think it wasn't much of a picture."

"That's so, although he's made the bargain and must stand by it. The price shall



THE GOLDEN HEART

be seventy-five dollars, Miss Curtis, and Heaven pity the poor misguided wretch who pays it!"

"I don't think so at all," answered Natalie stoutly. "It is a perfectly sweet picture, and if you'd sell it to me——"

"Never! But it's yours this instant if you'll be kind enough to accept it. It really ought to be yours, Miss Curtis, for if it hadn't been for you it wouldn't have been painted."

"I don't see what I had to do with it," said Natalie.

"Everything. In the first place, if I hadn't seen you standing on the balcony I wouldn't have come in here——"

"That's a very pretty compliment, Mr. Merritt," she laughed, "but you forget that what you really came for was your morning cup of tea."

"Tea! I never drink the stuff!"

"But you said the doctor ordered it!" said Natalie, opening her blue eyes very wide.

"Now you're laughing at me," he complained.



THE GOLDEN HEART

"Laughing at you! The idea!" She looked very serious and a trifle hurt, and Paul viewed her doubtfully.

"I believe you are, just the same," he said. "Anyhow, that was all nonsense about the tea. I saw the sign and so—well, you'd have done it yourself if you'd been me."

"Really!" she replied rather coldly. "You have an excellent opinion of me, Mr. Merritt."

"But look here, Miss Curtis, I—why, deuce take it, you're making me out a—regular bounder! Any fellow would have done the same thing. There's no harm in wanting to talk to a pretty girl——"

"I don't care for your compliments, Mr. Merritt."

"I'm not complimenting you; you are a pretty girl, a charmingly pretty girl. And I'd do it again to-morrow, and there's no use in being angry at me. Why, hang it, I'd have done it if the sign had said 'Cold Poison'!" He searched anxiously for signs of relenting, but she still gazed through the window very gravely.

"It—it's all right, isn't it, Miss Curtis?"



THE GOLDEN HEART

he asked anxiously. After an instant she turned and faced him severely.

"You must never do it again, Mr. Merritt. And I don't think it is very nice of you to make remarks about my—my looks. I can't help it if I've got a horrid little nose, and—and I *do* try not to get freckled; I wear veils a lot, but it doesn't do any good."

"Good Lord! I love the freckles!" exclaimed Paul. "And I——"

"Mr. Merritt!"

"Well, I do," he muttered stubbornly. "And as for your nose——"

"I'd rather not——"

"It's the—the darlinest nose in the world!"

"Mr. Merritt!"

"And your eyes——"

Now, however, her face expressed amusement and Paul faltered and stopped.

"Really, Mr. Merritt," she said with smiling coolness, "anyone would think you were making love to me!"

Paul stared a moment rather blankly. Then,

"Why, by jove, I believe I am!" he exclaimed.



THE GOLDEN HEART

"Then don't you think you had better stop? Considering that we don't know each other, isn't it rather ridiculous, Mr. Merritt?"

"Not a bit! I've seen you and talked to you five or six times and that's enough to settle it with me. Of course, if you say I mustn't do it, if there's someone else ahead of me, I won't. Is there?"

"Mr. Merritt, you're too funny for words!" she laughed. "Why, you don't even know my name!"

"Of course I do! You're Miss Curtis."

"Oh! Well, and what is my first name? Or doesn't that matter?"

"It matters, yes, but not very much. I'll bet it's something mighty pretty, though."

"Perhaps."

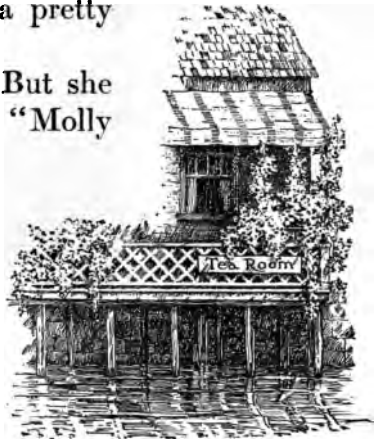
"But you're going to tell me, aren't you?" he begged.

"You said it didn't matter, Mr. Merritt."

"It does—now. Please tell me!"

"We-ell, would you call Molly a pretty name, Mr. Merritt?"

"Awfully pretty," he declared. But she was sure his face dropped a little. "Molly



THE GOLDEN HEART

Curtis," he said reflectively. Then, with enthusiasm; "It's wonderful how well it suits you!" he said. For some reason beyond his comprehension she leaned back against the window and laughed delightedly.

"Then it isn't Molly?" he asked hopefully.

"Oh, but it is," she answered, struggling for gravity. "Molly Curtis is the name. I'm afraid you don't like it, Mr. Merritt."

"I'm crazy about it," he replied instantly. "Anyhow, a name doesn't matter; it's easily changed. Would you care very much if I called you Molly?"

"I—I'm afraid I would," she answered demurely.

"Then what shall I call you?"

"Won't Miss Curtis do?"

"Of course it won't! If I'm to make love to you I've got to call you by your first name—Molly."

Her smiles died away suddenly and she arose gravely.

"Please be sensible, Mr. Merritt," she said. "I'd like to be friends with you, but if you are going to be silly and treat me this



THE GOLDEN HEART

way, why—" she smiled slightly—"you must go somewhere else for your tea."

"But, Miss Curtis——" he began distressedly.

"Please!" she said softly, with a warning glance toward the door. A car had stopped outside the gate and several chiffon-veiled ladies were getting out. "You'll excuse me now, won't you, Mr. Merritt? You see, I shall be busy."

"But—I may come again—about the picture?" he begged humbly. She viewed him doubtfully.

"You promise to behave and not—not do it again?"

"I promise anything!" he declared eagerly.

"Then you may come—about the picture."

"You're a dar—a brick!" he cried softly. "Good-bye." He held out his hand and after a moment of hesitation she laid hers in it.

"Good-bye," she said calmly, ignoring the fact that he was crushing her fingers painfully.

The visitors had paused outside the gate



THE GOLDEN HEART



to disencumber themselves of their veils and Paul escaped before they entered. A few minutes later he found himself in the middle of the harbor, quite out of breath and very, very warm, pulling at the oars as though for dear life. He tossed the oars down and laughed, wiping the perspiration from his face.

"Must be going to a fire," he murmured. Then his gaze sought the tea house and he stared at it for several minutes while the skiff bobbed idly about in the sunlight. Finally he sighed, shook his head, and, addressing the world at large, said ecstatically: "Isn't she great!"

Then he took up the oars again, but he rowed slowly now, his thoughts very busy.

An hour later Natalie, having tied up the last bundle very badly and changed the last bill with an error of only twenty cents, saw her customers depart with relief. She made a memorandum of the purchases in a little red-covered book, biting the end of her pencil and frowning intensely in her effort to remember. Then, glancing at her watch, she put on her hat, humming softly and

THE GOLDEN HEART

happily the while. A big blue automobile rolled almost noiselessly to the gate and the driver blew a blast on the horn. Natalie secured the "Back at Two O'clock" notice to the door, locked it, and went slowly down the path, glancing about her at the little garden. The flowers were coming along fast now under the kindly influence of rain and sun. The sweet-peas already showed a few blossoms, the larkspurs were shooting up whole inches every day and the hollyhocks along the fence were waist-high. But I don't think Natalie noticed all this. There was a faraway look in her smiling blue eyes, and when she reached the car she stood for a moment beside it as though she had forgotten what she had come for. At last she said:

"I don't want to go home quite yet, Leon. Drive around by the Point, please, and go slowly."



226672A

VII.

THE next morning the canvas was measured, and during the operation Natalie drew Paul's attention to the fact that the size of it was plainly stamped on the stretcher, and Paul was so surprised! And afterwards, as seemed the one natural thing to do, they sat in the cool, dim, flower-scented shop and talked of—well, of Painting and Tea Houses, and Flowers and Music and Drama and Books and Rockhaven and Life. But more especially they talked of Themselves. After all that was by far the more interesting subject. And while they were on that subject Paul, who was to-day a veritable model of propriety and discretion, said:

"I wish you'd tell me something about yourself, Miss Curtis. I've told the story of my life from birth to yesterday, and probably bored you to death, while you haven't said a thing."

"There isn't much to tell," answered



THE GOLDEN HEART

Natalie smilingly from the length of the chest by the window. "Things don't happen to girls, you see, Mr. Merritt; at least, they don't to me."

"Well, but, where do you live? Not here, of course?"

"But I do."

"In Rockhaven? All the year around?"

"No, only from June to October."

"And in the Winter?"

"New York."

"New York! And I never met you!"

"Well, considering that you haven't been there much and that it is rather a large town it isn't so surprising, is it?" she laughed. Paul shook his head.

"It is to me. That's the trouble with that place. The people you want to know you never do meet, it seems."

"Perhaps," said Natalie, "we aren't quite in the same set. Young women who sell post cards and pottery and tea and things for a living——"

"But that hasn't got anything to do with it," he interrupted impatiently. "What difference does it make whether one sells



THE GOLDEN HEART

post cards or steel frames and concrete?
We all sell something in this world."

"Still steel frames and post cards aren't usually found in the same set, are they?"

"They're going to be next winter," he answered. "I mean, I hope you'll let me call on you, Miss Curtis."

"Next winter is a long way off, Mr. Merritt."

"But I may?"

"I suppose so, if you care to."

"I certainly do!"

"My afternoon is Tuesday, Mr. Merritt," she said mockingly, "although, if you happen to be busy then, most any day will do as well."

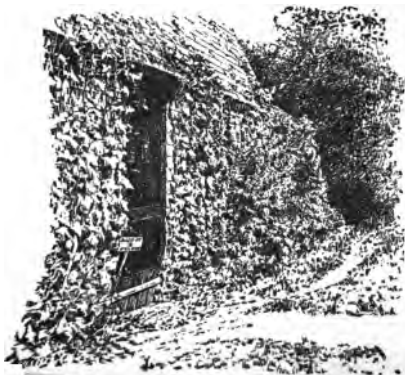
"I can't quite make you out," he complained. "You run this tea house and seem awfully keen about making money, but—somehow——"

"Yes?" she asked smilingly.

"Well, you don't look the part," he blurted.

"Now that is really unkind, Mr. Merritt! Why?"

"Oh, I don't know," he said, studying



THE GOLDEN HEART

her. "For one thing, though, you dress too—too well."

"Really, Mr. Merritt!"

"Can't help it! And it isn't only what you wear but the way you wear it. I know waists like that cost money, and so do ooze pumps and silk stockings." Natalie's feet disappeared under her white skirt. "And those two rings —Of course, it's none of my business, and I suppose it sounds impertinent—"

"A little, perhaps."

"But you see what I mean, don't you? I—I can't quite believe that you're—well, bonafide, Miss Curtis."

"But if I assure you that I really do own this place, Mr. Merritt? Then what? You surely can't doubt that I am running it?"

"N-no, but—maybe it's just for amusement."

"That *is* unkind! You're making me out an amateur, a dilettante, when I really thought I was quite professional. Besides, you say yourself that I'm keen about making money."

"Even an amateur might be that," he



THE GOLDEN HEART

laughed. "Well, I give it up. But, just the same, there's something I don't understand."

"Doesn't it occur to you that nowadays one has to dress decently to do business? Things have changed that way, haven't they, Mr. Merritt? Even you artists no longer roam around looking like animated scare-crows, do you?"

"Just the same——" began Paul, unconvinced.

"You said that before," she mocked. "I'm afraid, Mr. Merritt, you're a trifle stubborn."

"I dare say I am," he answered, tapping a cigarette thoughtfully on his thumb-nail. "You said you had a partner in the business. Where is she at present, Miss Curtis?"

"I don't seem to recall," replied Natalie, frowning a little, "that I mentioned her as a 'she.'"

"Battle said she was." Natalie looked a trifle startled for an instant.

"You have been discussing me with Mr. Battle?" she asked carelessly.

"No, not discussing. I spoke of—of The



THE GOLDEN HEART

Golden Heart and he said that you had a young lady with you."

"Oh, was that all?"

"I think so. Except that he seemed rather surprised, I believe, that you had returned from somewhere; he said you'd been away."

"I'm flattered that Mr. Battle should interest himself in my doings. However, he was mistaken. It was my—my associate who went away, Mr. Merritt."

"Is she coming back again?"

"In a week or so. I had a letter from her this morning. Her brother was taken ill in New York with typhoid and she went to take care of him. They are all alone in the world and very fond of each other. Was there—any other question that had occurred to you, Mr. Merritt?" she asked sweetly.

"Yes," Paul answered unperturbedly, "but it's rather an important one—to me, at least, and I'll wait awhile longer, Miss Curtis."

"Maybe I won't be so ready to answer another time," she said lightly.



THE GOLDEN HEART



"Oh, you'll answer all right," he replied, lighting his cigarette, "but I wish I knew how." He stole a glance at her as he waved his match out but found only smiling unconcern. "There *is* another question, though," he went on. "You told me you didn't live here." He indicated the upper regions of the tea house with a stream of smoke. "Where do you live, please?"

"Not very far away; here on the Neck. But I have no afternoons in Summer, Mr. Merritt."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of calling," he replied easily. "I just wondered if you could tell me whether the Blythes are here yet!"

Natalie shot a glance of alarm at him, but—

"I think—I know they are," she answered readily. "Why?"

"I ought to call on them," he answered gloomily. "Peter Blythe is one of the partners in dad's concern, you know. Mother made me promise to go and see them. I hate calls, though. Do they live near here?"

THE GOLDEN HEART

"About a mile." Natalie examined a ring with a good deal of interest. "Do you know them well?"

"Haven't seen any of them since I was in college," he answered. "When I was a kid Mrs. Blythe and I used to be pretty good chums. She's a corker. The old man's a bit heavy. Used always to greet me with 'Well, my little man, what are you learning these days?' As I wasn't learning anything those days it annoyed me."

Natalie laughed. "It does sound like him," she agreed.

"You know them?"

"They are rather good customers of ours, Mr. Blythe especially. The daughter comes in quite often, too. Have you met her? But of course you have."

"Ye-es, I used to know her. She was pretty young then; a thin little thing, mostly legs and arms and pig-tails. I don't remember much about her. What is she like now, Miss Curtis?"

Natalie pondered.

"Well, I suppose she's a good deal older than when you knew her, Mr. Merritt."



THE GOLDEN HEART

"Yes, I suppose she's quite grown up by this time."

"Quite, I should say. As for what she is like, I hardly know what to say. I *have* heard her called charmingly pretty, but——"

"I wonder," laughed Paul, "why one woman can never praise another woman without a 'but' at the end?"

"Is that peculiar to women?" asked Natalie. "It seems to me that I've very frequently heard men say 'He's an awfully decent sort, but——'"

"I dare say," laughed Paul. "So she's pretty, eh? Wonderful how plain girls get pretty as they grow up, isn't it? Well, I must go around and see them."

"You seem more reconciled now that you've heard about the pretty daughter," said Natalie demurely.

"Not a bit; I wish I were. I don't even remember that girl's name; Mehetabel or something like that, isn't it?"

"Something like that, I think, but that doesn't sound just it."

"How do I get to their place, Miss Curtis? Which direction is it?"



THE GOLDEN HEART

"You take the first road across the Neck after coming around the end of the harbor, Mr. Merritt. The Blythe's place is at Popple Head; it's called The Ledges; you'll see the name on the gate."

"The Ledges. I suppose they live in style. Old Peter was always great for putting on front."

"I fancy he's put on a good deal more since you saw him last," Natalie laughed. "When do you expect to make your duty call, Mr. Merritt?"

"Oh, some day. There's no hurry, I suppose. I ought really to do some work while this weather lasts."

"Of course you ought. And please don't forget to get the frame for the picture in the midst of your social activities."

"I'll see about it this afternoon. He ought to put it together so I can bring it over to-morrow."

"But he won't, Mr. Merritt. You don't know Rockhaven yet, I'm afraid. He will promise it to-morrow but you'll get it a week from then."

"Rockhaven doesn't know me yet, Miss



THE GOLDEN HEART

Curtis. You'll see the frame—and me with it—to-morrow morning."

"He will send it over for you if you are busy," she suggested.

"Oh, I shan't be busy—to-morrow," answered Paul. "You see, I've got to look around and find something to paint. Fact is, I—I've been wondering how this place would look from the front."



VIII.

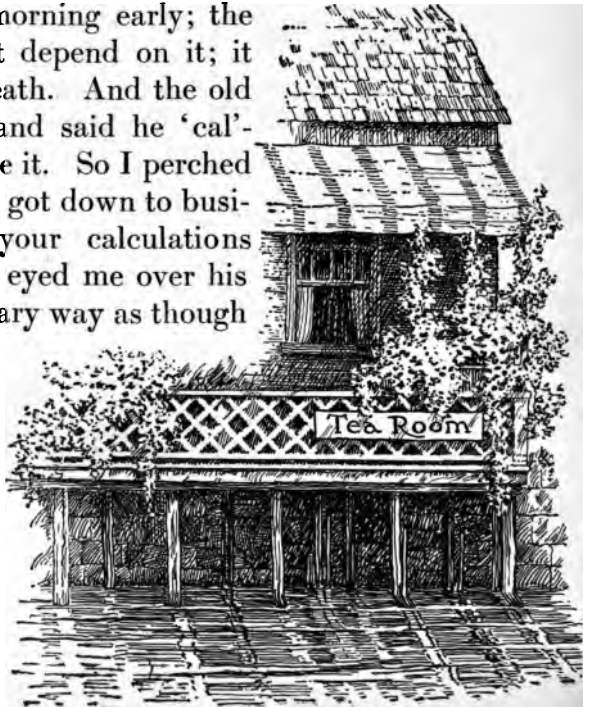
PAUL was as good as his word and he and the frame arrived at The Golden Heart promptly at half-past nine the next morning.

"Either you stole it," declared Natalie sternly, "or you bribed him."

"I didn't steal it and I didn't bribe him," said Paul. "I—I merely appealed to his civic pride."

"Good gracious! Is there really such a thing in Rockhaven?"

"It would seem so, Miss Curtis." He chuckled. "It was rather funny. Of course, I said the usual things at first; I had to have the frame this morning early; the sale of the picture might depend on it; it was a matter of life or death. And the old rascal nodded his head and said he 'calculated' he could let me have it. So I perched myself on the counter and got down to business. 'Just what do your calculations amount to?' says I. He eyed me over his specs in his sad, world-weary way as though



THE GOLDEN HEART

I was a new kind of a—a fish. ‘You come ‘round in the mornin’,’ he says. ‘And find it isn’t ready,’ says I, pert-like. ‘Now, look here, Mr. Hedges, it won’t take you half an hour to put that moulding together. Let’s go in back there and ‘do it now.’ You get busy with the mitre-box and I’ll entertain you with quips and merry jests.’ But he wouldn’t think of it. He had lots of work ahead, he said; couldn’t possibly get at my job before this morning; had to do things in their turn. Well, I pinned him down to the fact that the most important work in sight was to clean a family portrait for some local Codfish King and re-gild the frame. ‘Have to have it to-day, do they?’ asks I. Well, they didn’t exactly have to have it to-day, but they’d been waiting some time for it and he cal’lated he’d better get at it. So then I tried bribery; told him I’d pay twice the amount he asked if he’d have the frame ready at nine this morning. He just looked at me as though I was plumb crazy.”

“He would,” laughed Natalie. “They all do that here. If you offer them more than they ask in order to get something right



THE GOLDEN HEART

away they think you're insane and generally refuse to do it at all!"

"Yes, and old Hedges got quite peevish. 'If I could do it for you I would,' he said. 'Ain't no use offerin' me more money; don't want more money; I give you a price an' if that ain't satisfactory I cal'late you can get someone else to do it for yer.' Then I had to smooth him down, and that took some time. Finally I threw myself on his mercy; asked him to do it just out of pure kindness of heart and brotherly affection. Nothing doing, Miss Curtis. He just blinked his eyes and watched them loading codfish across the street. So then I appealed to his civic pride. I wasn't at all sure he had any; it didn't stick out on him anywhere, but I took a chance."

"'Well,' I said, 'I guess it's about the way I've heard it was, Mr. Hedges. They told me I couldn't get anything done in Rockhaven under a fortnight. I suppose the best thing to do is to send down to Boston and get it there.'"

"'Who's been talkin' to yer?' he asked, sort of perking up. 'Some o' them Summer



THE GOLDEN HEART



Folks, I cal'late.' I wish you could have heard him say Summer Folks, Miss Curtis; you'd have felt pretty small and mean. I discovered, by the way, that Hedges divides humanity into three groups: Natives, Painters and Summer Folks. The first are the Lord's elect, the artists are harmless and half-witted, and the Summer Folks are rampant lunatics. I acknowledged that he was correct in his surmise and he asked who the particular person was. I told him it was a young lady from New York. He sniffed his contempt. 'Them's the worst of all, them New Yorkers,' he said. 'They think there ain't nothin' good comes from anywhere outside o' New York. Cal'late I can do as good a job o' picture framin' as you can get there.' 'Well,' said I, 'it wasn't a question of workmanship so much as of getting the job done. The lady,' I explained, 'told me that if I wanted to get this frame inside of a week I'd have to send away for it.' 'Does she live on the Neck?' he asked. 'Yes,' I told him. He sniffed again, the sniffiest sort of a sniff. 'I cal'late I know her,' he said. 'What time was you

THE GOLDEN HEART

wantin' this frame?' 'Nine o'clock tomorrow morning,' I said. 'I'll have it fer yer.' And he did."

"Civic pride!" scoffed Natalie. "It was pure contrariness. He just wanted to spite me."

"Perhaps," Paul laughed. "Anyway, when I left the shop this morning he said: 'You might ask that Tea House Young Lady if she could get that frame any quicker in New York.' And I promised I would. Could you?"

"He's an irritating old man," laughed Natalie. "And I'm almost sorry you got it!"

"Well, it's here and I suppose we might as well make use of it," said Paul.

So the picture was installed in the frame and Natalie found some brads and a hammer and they drew off to view the result, which was quite satisfactory. Then they formed themselves into a Hanging Committee and finally found a location in the best light by moving several other pictures. But it didn't show up well against the brown boards and Natalie ordered it down again



THE GOLDEN HEART

and pulled a piece of faded green cotton from the old chest and made Paul tack it on the wall. Against that "The Golden Heart" showed off much better and they were both greatly pleased, and, as it was a very, very hot morning, they went into the kitchen and made lemonade, using the last scrap of yesterday's allowance of ice, and then sat on the balcony and drank it and talked and talked about—really, I think it was Themselves again! But, then, what can you expect? They were young and healthy and normal and knew nothing of strange cults and vague religions, of isms and osophies. The lemonade was cold and soul-satisfying, the harbor spread blue and unruffled before them, and the nasturtiums nodded and smiled. And I fancy that the nereid who had witnessed that first meeting must have smiled too as she peeped up from the shade of the old willow. Even when one possesses the accumulated wisdom of thousands of years it is undoubtedly a satisfaction to find that one's predictions have come true.



IX.

OF course, with the picture finished and hung ready for a purchaser there was no apparent excuse for further calls at The Golden Heart. But it is a poor lover who can't invent, and Paul went over one day to see whether the painting wouldn't look better for a coat of thin varnish (he decided that it wouldn't, but the decision wasn't reached until almost noon), and another day to view the tea house from front and sides and all angles, with another picture of it in mind. Another day—well, the other day he forgot to invent any excuse and just went! And neither he nor Natalie appeared to notice anything out of the way. But there was one day, and it followed the day of the hanging, when he didn't go. It was Sunday and he had learned that on Sundays the Golden Heart was not opened. I would like to tell how Paul went to church in the morning in the little Episcopal chapel on the hill, and how in the afternoon he re-



THE GOLDEN HEART

mained respectably on the hotel veranda as did many others and read improving literature, and how in the evening he joined the little company who held Evening Prayer in the music hall and sang the hymns which are so familiar that you don't have to have a hymn book. As a matter of fact, however, he did none of these things. Mostly he moped. In the morning he smothered himself in the pages of a New York paper and smoked and gazed discontentedly across the harbor. In the afternoon, having eaten far too much of that unchristian repast known as Sunday Dinner, he was driven to exercise and so took his sketching box and wandered back from town and spent an hour daubing a panel with paint and a subsequent ten minutes scraping it off again. Later he remembered that he ought to have called on the Blythe's. But as it was then five o'clock and he was several miles away he called on a brother artist instead and stayed to supper and ate two of Anton Sylva's immature and unlawful lobsters and smoked much more than was good for him and finally went early to bed thoroughly



THE GOLDEN HEART

detesting the American Sabbath as an institution.

And then,—it was a Thursday, and thereafter all Thursdays were Red Letter Days in Paul's calendar,—began another spell of rain. When he got out of bed that morning and sent the curtain at the front window screeching upward the harbor was a sheet of gray-green glass pitted with rain-drops. There wasn't a breath of wind and the flag on Strawberry Island drooped soddenly against the pole. Through the open window came the faint wail of the bell-buoy, and the chill, damp, salty air made him shiver. He wondered, as he dressed, whether the Golden Heart would be opened for business on such a beast of a day, and feared not. Subsequently he thought that it might. Subsequently again he was pretty sure that it wouldn't. And by the time he was ready for breakfast he was so worked up about it that he had quite lost his appetite. Battle came over and told him that it was just the day to finish his painting at the fish wharf, and Paul agreed but said that he wasn't feeling very



THE GOLDEN HEART

keen for work and Battle had better not wait for him. And Battle went off grumbling about lazy beggars, leaving Paul to finish his coffee and note with deep disgust that the rain was fast becoming a deluge. And then, just when things were at their worst, outside and in, a boy told him that he was wanted on the telephone and he hurried down the hall with all sorts of absurd and improbable thoughts impeding his heart action. Blessings on a world where sometimes the blissfully impossible comes to pass! With the door of the dark, stuffy little booth closed behind him and his ear glued to the receiver, he heard her voice! And then—



X.

"Is that Mr. Merritt?"

"Yes! Good morning! Is that You!"

"Yes, this is Miss—this is me."

"Well! Good morning! I—I——"

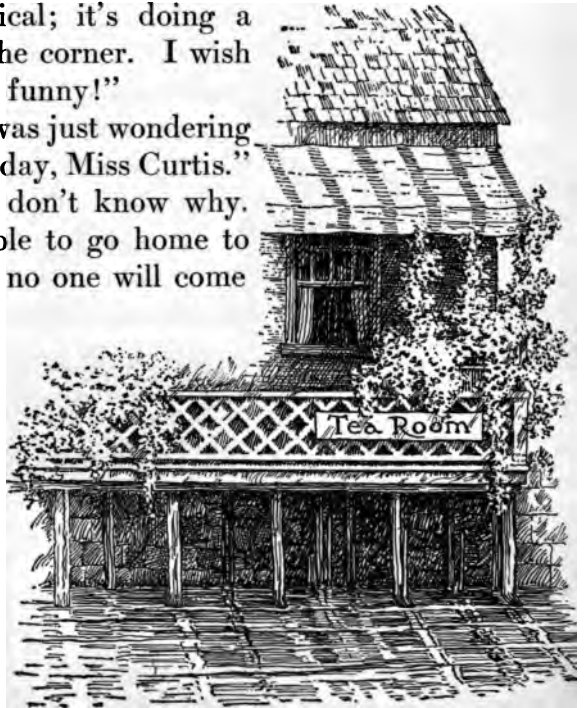
"But it isn't a good morning, Mr. Merritt; it's a frightful morning; and the roof's leaking!"

"Great Scott, you don't say so! Do you—do you want a plumber—I mean a carpenter, or a roofer?"

"Oh, no, thanks, it isn't that bad. A tin pail answers very nicely. Listen; can't you hear it dropping? You can't? Really? It's quite musical; it's doing a little scale over there in the corner. I wish you could hear it; it's too funny!"

"I wish I could! I—I was just wondering whether you'd be there to-day, Miss Curtis."

"Yes, I'm here, but I don't know why. I'm afraid I shan't be able to go home to luncheon, and, of course, no one will come a day like this."



THE GOLDEN HEART



"Won't they! You watch me! What's the quickest way, swim or ride?"

"Oh, I don't think you'd care for this place to-day. It's frightfully cold and there's no way of heating it. I'm wearing a sweater this minute and my hands are blue."

"Does that mean I'm not to come?"

"N-no, of course you may come if you want to. I was merely warning you of what to expect."

"That's all right. I've got a sweater myself. I'm coming right over."

"Really?"

"Really! It's a short swim." (Auricular evidences of amusement at the other end of the line.)

"Oh, I think you'd better take a carriage. And, Mr. Merritt——"

"Yes! Yes! . . . Hello, Miss Curtis! Hello! . . . Confound it! I say, operator, you've cut—— Is that you, Miss Curtis? Wait, please, I didn't get the first of that. Some idiot cut me off."

"I say if you are really coming won't you please bring over some crackers and some cold sliced ham and some chocolates."

THE GOLDEN HEART

"Chocolates?"

"Yes, chocolates; c,h,o,c——"

"You mean candy?"

"Of course! Mixed chocolates. You get them at the drug store and *not* the Ice Cream Parlor. And the cold sliced ham and crackers, just plain soda crackers, you get at the——"

"Harness store. Don't you worry, Miss Curtis; I'll find them. Cold sliced choc—ham, crackers and mixed chocolates. Anything else?"

"No, that's all. You see, I shall have my luncheon here, and——"

"Hm; what happens to me, please?"

"Why?"

"Where do I get luncheon?"

"Are you hinting for an invitation?"

"Exactly."

"We-ell, perhaps if it's raining terribly hard then, oh, just remorselessly, you know!—you may stay. But you won't get much."

"Much! What more could I ask than mixed ham—no, sliced ham and chocolates, Miss Curtis? I can't think of anything



THE GOLDEN HEART

I'd rather have! Somehow my soul simply demands them!"

"Really? And you may have all the tea you want."

"Beautiful tea! That settles it! I can't wait! I'll be right over with the supplies. Don't want a porter-house steak, do you?"

"Now, you're backing out!"

"Don't you believe it! I'm so hungry now I can't——"

"What did you say? So hungry you can't what?"

"Wait to see you!"

"Oh! Well, good-bye, Mr. Merritt. Don't forget your sweater."

"I won't. Good-bye. I'll . . . Hm; gone!"



XI.

There are far worse things than sitting huddled in a corner of a draughty carriage, with the rain blowing in on you between the flapping, misfit curtains, listening to the hiss of the torrent and the splash of hoofs and wheels, so long as at the end of your journey the Right One is awaiting. Paul, sweated and rubber-coated, guarded his purchases, smoked quite contentedly and watched over the driver's shoulders the long road twist and turn around the end of the harbor. *Squish-squash* went Dobbin's hoofs, *creak-creak* went the wheels and springs; a gust of wind pounced down upon them as they topped the hill and drove the rain spattering in. Below, over the roofs of the scattered houses, the harbor dark and angry, churned by the storm, was visible for a moment. The fish wharves were deserted. Boats at anchor rolled and plunged, tossing bare spars back and forth against a leaden sky. The whistle-buoy's



THE GOLDEN HEART

dirge came, now loud, now faint as the wind tore its sound. The carriage rattled and bumped and swayed down the hill and into the comparative peace of a ravine formed on one side by a granite cliff, under which nestled a little red cottage, and on the other by a long gray fish house whose front bore the staring legend; Crosby's Codfish Cakes Can't Be Beat! The final B had been almost obliterated by some local wit, and the result appealed to Paul's sense of humor and kept him chuckling until the wharves were left behind and the road, straightening itself out for a brief space, went southward between mooreland and water. Here Popple Head Road bore off at an angle and dipped upward against the gray sky between banks of bayberry and sweet fern and wild cherry. On the harbor side tiny white cottages faced the bay, each with its neat picket fence and little garden in front. Beyond them, between the trees swaying about the gables, came momentary glimpses of the water, less angry here in the shallow coves. Then, at last, an orchard of gnarled apple trees



THE GOLDEN HEART

and the sign of the Golden Heart beyond swinging and creaking in the wind.

Paul paid his fare, collected his bundles, and dashed through the gate and up the path. The wide door opened at the right instant and he staggered dripping and laughing, into the white twilight of the shop.

"Oh, you're soaking wet!" cried Natalie in distress.

"Not a bit!" He tossed his cap down and shed his coat, while she took the bundles from his arms. "Had a fine drive over and never felt better in my life."

"Hang your things behind the door. It doesn't matter if they drip on the floor. Mercy me, what *have* you brought?"

"Ham and crackers and chocolates and a few other things," answered Paul gayly, following her to the kitchen.

"Ham! I should say so! Why, there must be two pounds of it!"

"Well, you didn't say how much and two pounds isn't a great deal for two hungry people, is it?"



THE GOLDEN HEART

"Of course it is, you silly man! And just look at all the crackers!"

"I know. You see, there are seven different kinds of soda crackers and I didn't know which kind you preferred. So I played it safe."

"I should say you did! And what—Mr. Merritt, *do* I look like a pig? *Why* did you get so much candy?"

"Five pounds, that's all. And that's a jar of cheese, the sort you can spread on with a knife, you know. And those are olives; two bottles, stuffed and un-stuffed. What is home without an olive, Miss Curtis!"

"You're perfectly absurd!" laughed Natalie. "And *what*——"

"Oh, that? Well, that sort of got in by accident," said Paul sheepishly. "It—it's a sort of preparation for making jelly. All you have to do is to stick it in hot water. The man asked me if I'd ever tried it, and of course I hadn't tried it and didn't want to lie about a ten-cent package of jelly, and so—so he put it in. It's flavored with raspberry. Do you like raspberry? They



THE GOLDEN HEART

had lemon, too, and orange and strawberry and peppermint—no, I'm not certain about peppermint——”

But Natalie was incapable of words just then, so Paul joined in the laughter. And after that, for the subsequent five minutes, they quarrelled as to whether Natalie was to be allowed to pay for the things, it being finally decided that she might reimburse Paul for one pound of ham and two packages of crackers. Then Paul opened the olives and the cheese and Natalie lighted the gas-stove and put the kettle over the flame. And then, while the water was heating, they went back to the shop and Natalie pointed out the leak—which had relapsed to a depressed trickle by now—and they viewed the picture again and Natalie told all the nice things that had been said of it.

“But nobody buys it,” he said mournfully, “and my board-bill is due to-morrow. Great Scott, how it does rain! You certainly were an angel to ask me over here.”

“That sounds like irony. Besides, I think you asked yourself.”



THE GOLDEN HEART

"Never! If you hadn't insisted on my coming I'd be sitting out under a shed on a fish wharf getting soaked to the skin and painting a masterpiece now. Isn't it jolly to be nice and dry and know that Battle is getting sopping wet?"

"Poor man! Where shall we eat our banquet?"

"On the balcony," said Paul. This was an excellent joke. It may not sound so to you, but I'm sure that it was, for they both laughed and laughed over it!

"Silly!" said Natalie scornfully. But somehow it didn't sound the way it looks, and Paul didn't mind it at all; liked it tremendously, in fact.

"It's so cold here," said Natalie, "I think it would be better to eat in the kitchen. Do you mind? The gas will take the chill off in there if we keep the door closed. And we can take this little table in——"

"I love to eat in the kitchen," declared Paul, seizing the table. Then the water boiled over with an indignant sizzle and Natalie flew to the rescue. The table was put in place and flanked by two chairs,



THE GOLDEN HEART

and Natalie laid a cloth and put a bowl of nasturtiums in the centre.

"There are the knives and forks and things," she directed. "You set the table. Can you?"

"Can I! Well, I haven't worked in a restaurant for nothing! How many forks does the law allow each person, Miss Curtis? Only one? Ain't there going to be no pie?"

"There's the ham. Put that on, please."

"What a stingy little plate of ham! Shall we take the olives out or spear for them? I'll bet there are millionaires lunching to-day who haven't got nearly as many kinds of soda crackers as we have, Miss Curtis. Isn't that a beautiful thought?"

"Had you rather have coffee or chocolate?" asked Natalie, pointing a spoon at him.

"Please."

"But which?"

"What are you going to have?"

"I'm going to drink tea."

"So'm I, then. What is good enough for you is good enough for me."



THE GOLDEN HEART



"But you don't like tea, Mr. Merritt!"

"Doctor's orders, ma'am."

"But, truly, wouldn't you like to have coffee or chocolate?"

"Truly I desire tea."

"Well, I know you won't drink it," sighed Natalie.

"Won't I! I'm so hungry and thirsty I could eat shingles and drink soapsuds."

"Does my tea taste like soapsuds to you, Mr. Merritt?"

"Your tea is like nectar, Miss Curtis. I never can get enough of it. Where's the cheese? Doesn't that look good? Aren't you crazy about cheese. Do you know, Miss Curtis, I fancy that in some previous existence I must have been a Welch Rarebit, I'm so fond of cheese!"

"There," laughed Natalie, "now we can sit down. It doesn't look like a very sumptuous repast, does it?"

"Allow me," murmured Paul, holding her chair. "Sumptuous! Why, it looks positively ostentatious. If Lucullus were here he'd die of envy. May I offer you some of the cold boiled ham? And which

THE GOLDEN HEART

of the fifty-seven varieties of crackers will you honor?"

"You didn't open them all?" exclaimed Natalie in dismay.

"Why not? How are we to tell which is best if we don't sample each?"

"But they won't keep; they'll be all soft and soggy tomorrow."

"Who wants to keep them? You don't seem to understand that this banquet is the real thing, Miss Curtis. No expense is spared. Let me recommend the elongated ones with the dimples."

"We have no napkins!" exclaimed Natalie. "Even if we are eating in the kitchen we ought to have napkins."

"By all means; let's have two; we don't care what it costs," agreed Paul. "She thanks you. Do you mind if I tuck it under my chin? I'm so afraid of spotting my shirt front!"

"Your 'shirt-front,'" replied Natalie, "is already spotted."

"I'm afraid it is." Paul viewed his sweater regretfully. "It's a little like Joseph's coat of many colors, isn't it? You



THE GOLDEN HEART

see, I was painting one day when a gust of wind blew my canvas off the easel and slammed it on my chest. I didn't have to use my palette any more all day. Did you ever taste better ham in your life?"

"It *is* good, isn't it?" asked Natalie, pouring the tea. "It's funny how nice things taste when you do this sort of thing. Here's your tea, and I expect you to drink every drop of it."

"I shall, thank you. No lemon to-day; a mere dash of the milk—pardon me, cream."

"You'd better apologize," said Natalie indignantly. "Have you any idea what this costs?"

"Break it to me."

"Thirty cents a pint!"

"Not really! There, you've spoiled my appetite. I suppose the cows have formed a trust."

Well, it was all nonsense, of course, but they didn't seem to think so. They chattered and laughed and beamed at each other over the width of the little table while the rain stormed against the house and the



THE GOLDEN HEART

wind entered uninvited and sent little drafts whisking about their feet. It was all very cosy and jolly, and Paul wouldn't have changed places with anyone in the world. And Natalie, with her hair a trifle tousled by the wind and her cheeks showing roses under the tan and her blue eyes asparkle—well, I think Natalie too was well satisfied with life for the moment. They ate like woodchoppers, like—in short, like twenty and twenty-six. Paul drank his tea to the last drop without a murmur, demolished slice after slice of ham, sampled the crackers impartially, speared olives with his pocket-knife, didn't neglect the cheese, and, in fact, did full justice to the occasion.

And, I fancy I hear you say, all this time there was no love making! Ah, but wasn't there! It isn't necessary to talk love in order to make love; a fortunate thing for the bashful and tongue-tied. Why, every time Paul looked across the table he made love. It was in his eyes and his voice every moment, and you may be sure that Natalie saw it and heard it. If he didn't literally



THE GOLDEN HEART

throw himself on his knees before her and declare his passion he expressed it plainly enough if rather more subtly. Bless you, he passed the crackers with the air of a Prince offering a kingdom and a coronet, and while he only said; "Have another, won't you?" her ears heard much more. There was a declaration of love with every olive impaled on the end of his knife-blade and stretched across to her. Passing the ham was an act of capitulation, of surrender of heart and soul. Every sip of tea was a silent toast and the drinking of it to the last drop meant a volume of things unspoken. No love making indeed!

And afterwards they went out to the chest under the broad window and wrapped their feet in shawls and barbaric things from the East, and Natalie nibbled her chocolates and Paul smoked his cigarettes, and the world was just a dim, white-lighted room sheltered from the storm and rain, and the only people in it a man and a girl. What they said while the hours sped and the shadows deepened wouldn't interest us. Just little things, unimportant things,



THE GOLDEN HEART

silly things often enough, I dare say. But to those two they meant a great deal, and were filled with a meaning you and I would never have suspected. Outside it rained and rained. Inside somebody's eyes were very blue and soft and tender in the waning light



XII



THE next day the storm continued during the early forenoon. Then the wind grew flukey, swung into the west, and finally died away altogether. The rain became a drizzle and the drizzle a gray mist, and at noon the world was filled with an amber light that presaged the return of the sun. The Golden Heart was deserted in the morning, but after luncheon Natalie appeared and opened doors and windows, and the sun, unable to resist that invitation, suddenly burst forth in a glory of warmth and light. It was a busy afternoon, for after being housed a day and a half, Rockhaven's summer colony took to carriages and motors and by five o'clock the Golden Heart might have displayed the Standing Room Only sign and Natalie had prepared so many pots of tea, toasted so many Swedish wafers, cut up so many lemons, and talked to so many persons that when she was called to the telephone to hear a

THE GOLDEN HEART

message which had been received for her at the telegraph office in the village her earnest hope was that it might be signed "Molly." And it was. "Arthur well enough to leave. Will be back to-morrow afternoon.—Molly." Natalie gave a sigh of relief and returned to the fray. It was after six when the last car rolled away, and when, half-way through her task of cleaning up, she heard the jarring of brakes outside she dreaded the arrival of more customers. But a glance told her that her fears were idle, for the car was a dark blue one and Leon sat at the wheel. And then her eyes fell on a figure coming along the path and she gave a little cry of surprise and delight, dropped her towel, and flew to the door.

"Papa! Where did you come from?"

"Hello, Chick! Well, well! Got a hug for your old father?"

"Dozens, dear!" And she proved it there on the threshold. And her father, a very ample man with the voice of a drill-sergeant, fierce mustache, and kindly, twinkling, faded-blue eyes, held her very



THE GOLDEN HEART

close for a moment and endured her hugs and kisses with the utmost equanimity.

"I got through before I thought I should, Chick, and as New York is no place for a human being just now I took the first train back. Telegraphed to the house and told Leon to meet me at the station. He said he thought you were still here, so I came around to take you home. All ready, are you? Hello, what's been up? Had a riot here to-day?"

"Only tea-parties, dear. Dozens and dozens of people! I'm tired to death and smell of lemons and tea and dish water. I'll be ready in just a moment."

"Miss Curtis still away?" he asked as he found a seat.

"Yes, but she telegraphed an hour ago and will be back to-morrow afternoon," answered Natalie, straightening up the room. "And I'm so glad! I've had all the tea house I want for a long while. You see, she's been gone almost three weeks."

"How's the boy?"

"He's doing splendidly. And I'm so glad for Molly's sake. I don't know what she would do if anything happened to him."



THE GOLDEN HEART

"I guess she'd feel pretty badly. How's your mother?"

"Awfully well, dear. Was New York terribly hot?"

"Like an oven—two ovens—a dozen ovens!"

"And did you get your business done all right?"

"Right as a trivet. Got some new pictures, I see." He fumbled for his glasses.

"Two or three. And that reminds me, papa, that it's just about time for you to patronize Art again."

"Think so?" he asked with a grimace. "I'm a poor man, Chick, these days. This isn't bad; nice lot of color; who did it?"

"A new man; new to Rockhaven, I mean. His name's—Merritt."

"Merritt, eh? Any relation? I suppose not, though. What is it, anyhow? Looks sort of familiar, but I can't just place it."

"It's the Golden Heart, papa, from the harbor. Isn't it terribly good?"

"That's it, eh? Well, I never saw it from the harbor. He must have got pretty wet painting it."



THE GOLDEN HEART

"He was in a boat, you silly old papa!"

"You don't say! What else is there? Who did this? Oh, Battle, eh? Well, that's nice. How much is this, Chick?"

"That's—that's rather expensive," said Natalie. "It is good, though, isn't it? I suppose it's better work than the other, but I do love Mr. Merritt's color, don't you?"

He returned to The Golden Heart, examining it through and over his glasses.

"Color's almost *too* good," he said. "I don't believe that stone wall ever looked like that, Chick. Why don't you buy it? I should think you'd like to have it, as it's a picture of this place."

"I'd love to have it, dear, but I'd think so much more of it if you gave it to me."

"Hm! Well, I suppose I can't resist that. How much?"

"Only seventy-five dollars!"

"*Only* seventy-five? Hm; well, all right; I'll take it. Trust me until to-morrow?" But Natalie shook her head.

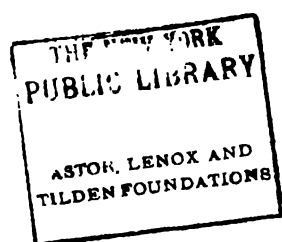
"Cash, please, papa."

"Cash! Great Ginger, you don't expect





HE RETURNED TO THE GOLDEN HEART, EXAMINING IT THROUGH
AND OVER HIS GLASSES



THE GOLDEN HEART

me to have seventy-five dollars in cash after getting out of a Pullman, do you? Wouldn't a check do?"

"Yes. You can write it here." She cleared a corner of a table for him and he sat down with a protesting groan and produced check-book and pen. "Does this let me off for the summer, Chick?"

"Mm-m, I don't know. Perhaps. I don't promise. Thank you."

"You're welcome, my dear. I suppose Miss Curtis will need all the money she can get after the expense of her brother's illness. Would she—er—accept a small check, do you think?"

"Never, dear. She's a perfect little silly that way. No, you'll just have to buy things, I guess."

"Will, eh? Well, pick out a hundred dollars' worth of truck for me, then, Chick. The Lord only knows what we'll do with it, though!"

"She can mark it 'Sold' and let it stay here until Fall, anyway," said Natalie. "Now I'm ready. If you don't mind, dear, we'll leave the picture here until to-morrow."



THE GOLDEN HEART

"Eh? Can't I have it after paying for it?"

"But I haven't delivered the check yet, you see."

"All right. Sounds like a game to me, though. Bet I'm getting cheated! What's this fellow Merritt's other name, Chick?"

"He never told me," said Natalie.



XIII.

“Do you—do you see anything different?” asked Natalie the next morning.

Paul’s gaze fell from her face to her waist, to her skirt, to the little tan pumps beneath.

“N-no.” His gaze travelled upward again. “Have you done your hair differently?”

“Not about me,” she laughed. “Anything different in the shop.”

“Oh! Why, it looks very clean and neat this morning. And the flowers are lovely. Are those your own sweet peas, grown on the premises?”

“Yes, but please look around and don’t be so—so horrid!”

“I am looking around. I—Hello!” His gaze fell on The Golden Heart. Tucked between frame and canvas was a card with the word “Sold” written large on it. “What’s that mean? You haven’t—really——”



THE GOLDEN HEART



Natalie nodded emphatically, joyously. "Really and truly! And here's a check, only I haven't taken our commission out yet."

"Well, what—do you—think—of that!" murmured Paul, crossing to the painting and examining it as though it had attained new virtues since his last sight of it. "Who bought it, for Heaven's sake?"

"Mr. Peter Blythe." Paul's face fell.

"Oh!"

"Why do you say 'oh' like that?"

"Well, I suppose he took it as a sort of joke," answered Paul glumly.

"Indeed he didn't! He bought it because I—because he liked it. He didn't know you did it, Mr. Merritt; I mean he didn't know you were his partner's son."

"He couldn't help knowing. It's signed there 'Paul Merritt.'"

"But it was very late when he came and the light was poor, and he's near-sighted, even with his glasses. He didn't know, really and truly he didn't. He asked me what your first name was, and I——"

"Well?"

THE GOLDEN HEART

"I," answered Natalie demurely, "said that you'd never told me."

"Still, he *will* find out, and then——"

"What if he does? That won't hurt the picture any, will it? He ought to like it better when he learns."

"He won't. He never had any use for me, I guess. On the whole, I think I won't sell it, Miss Curtis."

"O-oh, please! Why, just think, Mr. Merritt, if he takes it you won't have to trouble any more about selling a picture before October. And you won't have to go into your father's office. And you can keep right on painting and become a great artist——"

"No, I can't, Miss Curtis. I'm beginning to realize that I couldn't be a great artist, even a moderately good artist, if I kept on for fifty years. And I'm not sure that I want to be, either. I've been thinking it over lately, you see." He sat down on the chest and took one knee between his hands, facing her with a thoughtful frown. "Battle says you can't really paint unless you've starved awhile, and I guess



THE GOLDEN HEART

there's a good deal of truth in that. I never did starve, you see; never even knew what it was to be hungry for more than an hour at a time. Besides, why should I try to sell pictures when the country is full of poor devils all trying to do the same thing and really needing the money?"

"That's silly, I think," said Natalie. "At least—well, even if you went into your father's business you'd be competing with others who perhaps needed money more than you did, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, but I'd be doing something well and I'd have the right to receive money for it. Whereas, if I painted mediocre pictures and sold them I'd be all the time thinking of the fellows who painted a whole lot better and who couldn't sell. I don't suppose I make you understand just what I mean, Miss Curtis——"

"But you do. I was just thinking about it. Perhaps you are right. Still, you wouldn't have to sell your pictures, Mr. Merritt; you could just—just paint them, you know, and——"

"That would be a good deal like chasing

148



THE GOLDEN HEART

a car for a block and then not getting on," answered Paul with a laugh. "Salability is the final test of a picture's merit, Miss Curtis, and I don't think that I'd be satisfied to go on painting and painting and never know whether what I was doing was done well, do you? Besides, I could do that sort of thing if I cared to even if I was working for Blythe, Merritt and Carter."

Natalie sat silent a moment, staring at The Golden Heart. At last:

"I suppose you are right, Mr. Merritt, but it does seem a pity that all your preparation and your talent should be wasted, doesn't it?"

"I fancy it doesn't matter so much about the preparation, Miss Curtis. Lots of fellows have wasted three or four years after leaving college without much loss. As for talent, the world's full of it and it isn't quoted very high on the market. If I had genius——"

"But maybe you have!" she said eagerly. He shook his head.

"I haven't. Not an ounce. Just an eye for color, the ability to draw fairly well,



THE GOLDEN HEART

and some knowledge of brush work. No, I've about decided to quit Art with the capital A and go home and tackle Construction with a capital C. I wish now I'd gone in for architecture. I might have been some use to the firm then."

"I'm sure you'll be of lots of use as it is," said Natalie warmly.

"Besides," he went on, disregarding that, "some day I shall want to marry, and a fellow naturally feels as though he wanted to have something to show when—when he asks a woman to marry him. Don't you think so?"

"I—I suppose so. I—I never was a 'fellow,' though."

"But you're a woman," he insisted. "Wouldn't you think more of—of a chap if he amounted to something, Miss Curtis? If he was really making good at some business, no matter if it was only—only horse-shoeing?"

"I'd have to hesitate a long while between an artist and a horse-shoer," laughed Natalie.

"But it's so, isn't it?"



THE GOLDEN HEART

"I—I've never thought about it, really, Mr. Merritt. I think, though, that if I—I cared for—anyone it wouldn't matter one tiny bit whether he was a poor artist or—or a rich horse-shoer." She ended with a little laugh, half defiant and half apologetic. Paul smiled.

"You're supposing you already cared for him," he said. "But when it came to caring, I mean." He hesitated, looked at his hands, shot a sidelong glance at her, and went on— "Now—now take my case, for example. If I were to——"

"But I don't see what all this has to do with your picture," she interrupted. "The question is: What shall I tell Mr. Blythe? Don't you think, as you've made up your mind, or almost made it up, to not be a painter it matters less about who has The Golden Heart? Even if you are going to quit, Mr. Merritt, wouldn't it be a satisfaction to show your father that you can sell? And isn't one purchaser as good as another?" Paul studied that awhile. Finally:

"I suppose that's so," he answered more



THE GOLDEN HEART



cheerfully. "And I would like to win out against dad. Let him have it, then. But I'm not going to take any seventy-five dollars for it; it isn't worth it; besides, if I'm not a painter I don't have to sell things."

"But you can't *give* it to him! And here's his check all made out, Mr. Merritt."

"To me?"

"N-no, to me," answered Natalie, glancing at it and then quickly folding it again.

"Well, then, you just——" But he thought better of making that proposition, and began again. "I tell you. You give me half and keep half yourself; that'll be fair."

"Oh, no, it wouldn't. That's very silly of you." She dropped her chin in one cupped palm and stared for a minute past him through the open door. Gradually a little smile crept into her face, and—

"I tell you what we'll do," she exclaimed, facing him laughingly. "I'll cash this and take out our commission; that's fifteen dollars, you know. Then there'll be sixty dollars left, won't there?"

"Exactly."

"Very well, we'll put that in an envelope

THE GOLDEN HEART

and seal it up and write our names on it. And then—and then—” her gaze wandered back to the open doorway— “then some day we’ll—spend it together! Shall we?”

“Shall we! You bet we will! That’s a stunning scheme. When—when shall we spend it—together?”

Natalie shrugged her slim shoulders, laughed deliciously, and shot him a tantalizing glance from a pair of dancing blue eyes.

“Just—just some day,” she answered. “Perhaps next winter—in New York.”

“That’s a long way off,” he replied disappointedly.

“Oh, if you’re afraid I’ll abscond with it you may keep it yourself!”

“No, I’ll trust you,” he laughed. “Next Winter in New York it is. That’s a bargain! And now—now don’t you think we ought to do something to celebrate? Think; this is my first real sale, Miss Curtis!”

“We really ought to,” she answered, “but what can we do? Will you have some tea?”

“Not unless it’s compulsory, thanks.



THE GOLDEN HEART

Couldn't we go sailing? Just look at that harbor, Miss Curtis. Can you resist it?"

"I can't, but I've got to. I couldn't leave the shop, you see. Isn't it a wonderful day?"

"Wonderful! Too wonderful to stay indoors."

"I know, but—— Oh, I would like to do one thing, Mr. Merritt!"

"So would I! What's yours?"

"I'd like to row out to Strawberry Island; it's strawberry time, you know, and there are millions of them there. Would you like to do that?"

"Better than anything I can think of," he answered. "Will you go?"

"Yes, if you'll take me. But not now. Let me see. At four o'clock I'll be ready. Could you go then?"

"Could I? You just try me!"

"Very well, then; at four o'clock. Don't come here, though; meet me at the little wharf where the water boat lies. You know it?"

"I'll find it. At four o'clock, then! Don't forget, please!"



THE GOLDEN HEART

“Indeed I shan’t; I’m wild about strawberries!”

“Well, of course,” he said with affected diffidence, “I don’t object to your liking strawberries, but I’d like to remind you that I shall be there too. I don’t want to seem pushing, but——”



XIV.

"OH!" said Natalie in dismay.

Paul, drawing the skiff up on the little pebbly beach, looked around in alarm.

"What's wrong?"

"We forgot to bring anything to pick the berries in!"

"That's so." He tried his best to look heart-broken.

"Isn't that a shame?" she said. "I forgot all about it."

"So did I." He shook his head sorrowfully. "Awfully stupid of me, wasn't it?" Then he brightened. "We'll just have to pick them and eat them," he said.

"I suppose we shall," she agreed. "The trouble is I don't seem awfully hungry just now."

"Then we'll find a nice, quiet place and sit down and wait for an appetite. Let's follow this path and see where it takes us."

"But don't you want to go to the hatchery and see how they raise lobsters? They're



THE GOLDEN HEART

such funny little things! It's really very interesting." But Paul shook his head with decision.

"Please don't mention lobsters so soon after strawberries. It brings unpleasant recollections. I once tried the combination and it didn't agree with me. The French dressing had chives in it and there was whipped cream on the strawberries, and ——" He shook his head dolefully.

"How awful! No wonder it didn't agree with you. We won't go to see the cunning little lobsters, then, Mr. Merritt. We'll look at the lighthouse instead."

"That's safer. I never ate a lighthouse."

They followed the path that wound up from the inner beach over the rocks and grass and patches of anemonies and wild strawberries, leaving the fish hatchery to the right and heading along the edge of the cliffs toward the outer end of the island where the little squat lighthouse stood gazing out to sea. It was rough going in places, for there were rocks to climb, and at such times Paul took her hand and helped her, displaying an inclination to continue



THE GOLDEN HEART



the assistance long after it was needed. And at such times conversation languished, as though the touching of hands in some way sealed the lips. And it was not until they reached the centre of the island and a little plateau whose thin soil was carpeted with strawberry-vines, that connected speech returned to either. They were both a little out of breath then and Natalie's cheeks held a deeper pink than usual and her eyes sparkled like the blue waters of the channel. And Paul's heart was beating in a fashion out of all proportion to the recent exertion.

"Just see the berries!" she cried. "Why didn't we bring a pail or a basket or something?"

"I shall never forgive myself," he said remorsefully. "Aren't they rather small, though?"

"Why, no, not for wild ones. Aren't you going to pick any?" She knelt and began to gather the little crimson fruit, piling it in the palm of one hand.

"Not if they're wild," he replied. "They may be dangerous."

THE GOLDEN HEART

"You're just lazy. Here, catch!" He caught.

"What shall I do with it?" he asked in the hope that she would look up again from under her broad straw hat.

"Why, eat it, you stupid! Isn't it delicious?"

"Fine! If we only had some whipped cream——"

"You really are lazy, you know," she went on, returning to her charge. "You've been wasting days and days lately. I don't believe you've painted once since you finished The Golden Heart."

"I've been waiting for inspiration," he replied. "If you let me hold those you can pick some more."

"Inspiration! I shan't pick any more now; I shall sit down and eat these. And I don't think I shall give you any of them because you wouldn't help. O-oh, look!" She pointed to a crimson stain on the hem of her white skirt. "Isn't that mean?"

"You ought to put salt on it."

"You don't happen to have a salt-shaker



THE GOLDEN HEART

in your pocket, I suppose?" she asked laughingly.

"No, I very carelessly came away without one to-day. But perhaps we can find some on the rocks. Let's go and see."

So they clambered down to where the pools lay and Paul managed to scrape enough salt from the margins to cover the stain. Then he brought water and moistened it and Natalie spread it out in the sunlight. It was very pleasant there, and the rocks at their backs subdued the ardor of the breeze from the water. Natalie divided her spoils and when the last berry was gone held up her hand ruefully, the pink palm stained carmine.

"More salt, please," she demanded with a smile. She curled her hand before her face like a pink-lined shell. "Don't you love the fragrance of them? Smell!"

She reached her hand toward him and he seized the tips of the fingers and held it to his nose.

"Doesn't it smell—nice?" she asked.

"Heavenly," he murmured. Then, as she tried to draw it away, he pressed the



THE GOLDEN HEART

soft, warm palm against his lips and left a kiss in it.

"*Please!*" she whispered. He released it and it flew swiftly to her lap and lay curled tightly there inside its fellow.

"It really is—awfully fragrant, isn't it?" he said in a voice that was not quite steady. She was looking out to sea and made no answer. He wondered if he had offended her and looked up anxiously. And as he looked a little whimsical smile played around her lips and she laid the stained hand on her knee and slowly unclasped it.

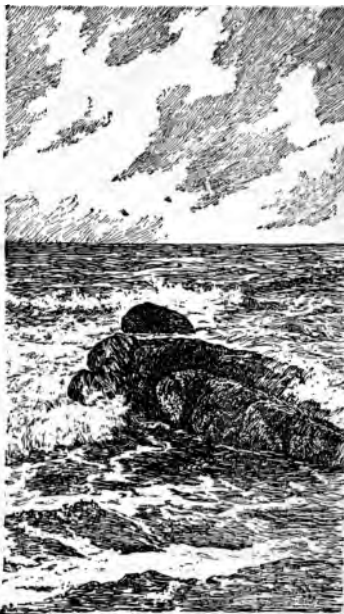
"It's gone," she said softly.

"What?" he asked in a whisper. She only shook her head.

"I know where there are lots more," he said boldly. But she pretended not to understand and fell to examining the stain on her skirt.

"I think the treatment has really helped, don't you?" she asked. "It's about dry, too, so——"

"It isn't dry at all," he demurred. "Besides, you must let it stay in the sun and bleach."



THE GOLDEN HEART

"But we haven't seen the lighthouse."

"We don't want to," he answered. "You've seen it dozens of times and I never cared for them."

"No, I've never been there but once," she said. "It's quite interesting; the funny little stairs and the big brass lantern and all." An unwelcome thought troubled him. He nibbled a grass-blade a moment, and then,—

"I suppose you showed it to somebody—that other time?" he asked with elaborate unconcern. She nodded.

"Yes, and he thought it was very interesting. You would, too, if you'd go and see it."

Paul devoured the blade of grass savagely.

"And I suppose you picked strawberries, too, that time? And stained your hand, and—and——"

"N-no, there were no strawberries then," she replied. "It was later in the summer. And so, of course, I didn't stain my hand. And even if I had——" She stopped and laughed amusedly.

"Look here!" Paul eyed her sternly. "Who was he?"

She shot a brief and provocative glance



THE GOLDEN HEART

from under her hat-brim and turned her gaze again to the ocean.

“Well?” he demanded.

“Well what?”

“I asked who he was, that other fellow who was so interested in—lighthouses.”

“But I don’t see why it should interest you—exactly,” she demurred.

“It does interest me, though!”

“Well, if you really must know—he was my father.”

“Honestly?”

“Honestly! Why not?”

Paul gave a deep sigh of relief and she turned her head and smiled across at him and he smiled back.

“That’s—all right,” he said. He reached out toward her hand which lay on the rock between them, but it moved away just in the nick of time and Paul made believe he was looking for another blade of grass. There was a long silence after that. Natalie gazed unswervingly at the sea and Paul gazed just as unswervingly at as much of her face as was visible to him under the edge of the jealous hat. Finally,—



THE GOLDEN HEART

"I believe that's the biggest hat in the world," he said discontentedly. "I can't see anything of you."

"Do you want to?" she asked as though quite surprised at the idea.

"Of course I do!"

"Why?" Her curiosity seemed so sincere as she looked around at him with wide eyes that his first answer died on his lips.

"Well, when you're talking to a person you naturally want to see them," he said weakly.

"Then I'll take it off," she replied readily. She took out the pins, laid the hat aside, and smoothed her hair. Paul seized the creation of straw and ribbon and looked it over curiously.

"Fancy having to wear a thing like that!" he said. "I don't see why women want to wear hats so much. There never was one made that was half so pretty as their hair."

"My hair isn't pretty," laughed Natalie. "Papa says it looks like burlap."

"Not pretty! Great Scott, it's the loveliest hair in the world! Burlap! The idea! It's like—like——"

"Please make it something nice," she begged, viewing him in pretended anxiety.



THE GOLDEN HEART

"For that I won't," he answered. "I wish, though, I wish you'd let me paint it."

"There, I knew you didn't really like it! What color would you paint it?"

"Just the color it is," he answered. "I suppose you wouldn't care to pose for me sometime, would you? I wish you would. I've never done figures much, but I'll bet I could paint you!"

"Thanks for the compliment, Mr. Merritt, but I wouldn't want you to spoil a canvas on me."

"You mean you won't? It wouldn't be hard, really; just a half an hour now and then; in the morning on the balcony there. Won't you, please?"

"What would you call it? The Shop Girl?"

"I think I'd call it 'Blue Eyes,'" he answered. "You will, won't you?"

"Do you want me to very much?"

"Awfully much!"

"Well, perhaps—some day."

"Thank you. I won't let you forget the promise."

"But I only said 'perhaps,'" she ob-



THE GOLDEN HEART

jected. "Besides, I'd have to ask—folks."

"Who?"

"My father and mother, of course."

"You never told me before you had a father and mother," he said aggrievedly.

"I don't think you ever asked me, did you? Why shouldn't I have parents, pray? Most everybody does, you know."

"Yes, but—I wish you'd tell me more about yourself."

"There's nothing to tell." She shrugged her shoulders lightly. "I said that before." But he shook his head, unsatisfied.

"I believe there's a whole lot to tell. You're—you're a sort of mystery, I think."

"Oh, lovely! You make me feel like the heroine of a novel. If only I had dark hair. I can't imagine a girl with light hair being a mystery, can you?"

"I can imagine a girl with light hair being something a whole lot better than a mystery."

"Really? What, please?"

"A—a perfect dear!"

"Then I shall live in hopes," she answered lightly. "And now I think we'd



THE GOLDEN HEART

better be starting back, don't you? The place is quite dry now."

"It's very early yet," he said. They examined the stain on the skirt together, their heads rather close and their hands brushing, and decided that it was almost unnoticeable. But as neither of them really looked at the spot they may be pardoned their decision. As a matter of fact, the salt and water treatment hadn't effected any palpable improvement. Natalie reached for her hat and put it on. Then Paul arose and held his hand to her and, after just an instant of hesitation, she laid hers in it and was pulled to her feet. And then just what each knew was going to happen did happen. Instead of releasing that hand Paul held it up and looked at it imprisoned in his own.

"Such a little thing, isn't it?" he said softly. The little thing fluttered and tugged, but he held it firmly. Then with his other hand he bent the fingers back and, stooping, pressed three hungry kisses against the small palm.

"Don't!" she whispered. "You mustn't! *Please!*" He released it and stepped back



THE GOLDEN HEART



a little giddily. She turned and ran quickly up the bank. At the top she faced him with reddened cheeks.

"It was the wrong one," she called back with a little tremulous laugh. Paul sprang after her.

"Then give me the other!" he said. But she held her hands out to ward him off.

"Please, Mr. Merritt! I shan't like you if—if you—do!"

"Do what?" he demanded triumphantly.

"Do—anything; do that. Please behave, won't you?"

"Will you like me if I do—behave?"

"Of course."

"How much?"

"Oh, that depends on how well you behave," she answered with a soft laugh.

"Molly!"

"No, I don't want to be called Molly!" She stamped her foot. "I hate that name."

"Hate your own name?" he exclaimed. "Why——"

"Perhaps—it isn't my own name."

"What do you mean? *Isn't* it your name?"

THE GOLDEN HEART

"Well, even if it is, I suppose I can hate it," she answered.

"But you just said——"

"I said it was getting late, Mr. Merritt," she replied with much dignity. "Please come along."

They were rather silent on the way back to the boat. Natalie declined all proffered assistance and Paul had a conviction that in some way he had offended her. In the dory she talked of a hundred things that didn't in the least interest him and metaphorically held him at such a distance that he grew taciturn and glum. And when the wharf was reached he allowed her to clamber out alone and they said good-bye very coldly and without mentioning seeing each other again. Natalie disappeared toward the road and Paul pulled savagely across the harbor to the hotel in a deplorable state of mind that remained with him all the rest of the day and evening.



XV.

A DAY of perversity; perversity on the part of the weather, which alternately shone and clouded, while a chill east wind drove the porch loungers to shelter; perversity on the part of Paul, who was wretchedly lonesome and ill at ease. He had made up his mind to stay away from the Golden Heart all that day—perhaps for many days—just to show her that—that—well, he couldn't quite define what it was he wanted to show her. Not that he could do without her, for he couldn't and he didn't want her to think so for a moment. As near as he could make out what he desired was to have her miss him and be a little lonesome and unhappy too. Not very commendable, that, but rather human withal, for Love is capable of cold-blooded cruelties that Friendship would revolt at.

The deuce of it was that he couldn't be certain that she would miss him. Perhaps she would be merely relieved. He imagined



THE GOLDEN HEART

her saying: "Well, thank goodness, that stupid Mr. Merritt isn't here to-day. Now I can get something done!" Well, if that was the way she felt about it he would take good care not to bother her again. At the moment he was standing at the end of the hotel veranda bracing himself against the piping wind, with a sub-conscious sensation of being uncomfortably cold. He stared gloomily out at the tossing water until Strawberry Island edged into his field of vision. His eyes softened and his heart warmed as he went over the hour they had spent together there yesterday afternoon. He recalled her words and glances, felt in memory that little warm palm against his lips, and a sudden rush of tenderness made his eyes close. What a fool he was! How like a spoiled child he was behaving. Of course she cared! He would row over at once and apologize for his idiocy and tell her he loved her more than anybody or anything, more than life itself!

Then sober second thoughts whispered with cautious, bloodless voices. Was he quite sure she really cared? Girls had pre-



THE GOLDEN HEART

tended before this. Were those blue eyes any more truthful than others? What had she said that could not be as readily construed into fun as into earnest? What right had he to think that after an acquaintance of a fortnight or so she was ready to fall into his arms at a word from him? After all, wasn't it merely a summer flirtation? It had started so with him, and if he had allowed it to become something more, why, the more fool he; doubtless the girl had better sense. No, he guessed he wouldn't go over to-day; he would be a little more certain before he made a further advance. Why, for all he knew, she might be laughing at him! Laughing at him for a silly, conceited, sentimental ass! He ground his teeth and turned shivering away, trying hard not to look across the harbor, and climbed rather miserably to his room. He stayed there until lunch time, lying on his bed with his head propped up on two utterly inadequate pillows, smoking and trying to read, his mood, like a pendulum, swaying alternately from hope to despair.

But when he emerged from the hotel after



THE GOLDEN HEART

luncheon he found Nature in a pleasanter mind. The wind had died down to a brisk invigorating little breeze that stirred body and senses to action. The clouds had driven back over the hills and the sun sparkled on harbor and town. Paul took a deep breath of the salt-laden air and his spirits arose at a bound. Whether she cared or not, he cared a very great deal. And if she could be won he meant to win her. So what was the sense in loitering here and wasting time? Life was short at the best. Why, he was already twenty-six! In another ten years he'd be an old man, or, anyway, a middle-aged one, which was probably just about the same thing! Every day counted, every hour; and he had lost a whole morning! Dolt! Fool! Idiot!

Five minutes later he was rowing frantically across the sunlit harbor, keeping the farther end of the hotel porch in line with the clump of cedars back on the hill, a proceeding which experience proved would bring him straight to the steps at the corner of The Golden Heart. He whistled as he rowed, sadly out of tune and yet so happily



THE GOLDEN HEART

that even had you had to listen you would have forgiven the discords. He would see her in a minute or two! That was cause for happiness, surely. Doubtless she would be busy, for the afternoons brought visitors to the tea house, but he would find time for a word with her and could drink his cup of tea with the rest of the chattering crowd and loiter and watch her to his heart's content. He tied his skiff, sprang up the steps, hurried through the little orchard and around to the gate. If it weren't for the looks of it he would jump the fence, he told himself. Thank Heaven, he had arrived ahead of the visitors! There were no vehicles waiting and as he approached the open door the dim, cool interior looked empty. On the threshold he paused. No one was in sight, but from the tiny kitchen came a woman's voice in song. The song he recognized, but the voice was strange. He hesitated a moment; then,

“Miss Curtis!” he called.

The singing stopped and a young woman came through the door. She was small and plump, with a plain, bright, merry



THE GOLDEN HEART

little face and dark hair brushed severely down to her ears. The long blue denim apron she wore somehow made her look even tinier.

"Yes?" she asked with a smile in which welcome was restrained by suspicion. You never could tell when a member of the male sex appeared whether he was going to prove a customer or an agent for soap, stove-blackening, or books.

"How do you do," said Paul doubtfully. "Is—is Miss Curtis in?"

"Yes, I am Miss Curtis. Won't you come in?"

"Oh!" said Paul blankly. "I mean Miss Molly Curtis."

"I'm Miss Molly Curtis," was the reply.

"*You!*" Paul stared. Miss Curtis drew a deep breath and thought of burglars, madmen and other dreadful things of which she had read.

"Did you want to see me?" she asked nervously, showing an inclination to retreat toward the kitchen.

"No—yes—I mean——" Paul stopped quite at a loss. "I wanted to see Miss—to



THE GOLDEN HEART



see the young lady who has been here lately."

"Oh!" Miss Curtis smiled her relief. "You want to see Miss Blythe?"

"Miss——" gasped Paul.

"Blythe; yes; she's not here to-day, but I think you can find her at her home. I'm sorry. Perhaps, though, I can attend to your business? I am in charge here, you see; Miss Blythe was merely looking after the shop while I was away."

"You said—Miss *Blythe*?" asked Paul dazedly.

"Yes, that is her name. Did you want to see her personally?"

"Not—not a relation of Peter Blythe's?"

"His daughter." Miss Curtis began to show signs of impatience and curiosity. Perhaps she scented a romance. At least, she drew nearer the strange visitor and observed him more attentively. It was evident that her information had for some reason quite upset the young man.

"They live about a mile from here, at Popple Head. It isn't a long walk if you cut across the moor."

THE GOLDEN HEART

"Thank you," muttered Paul. "It's of no consequence; I'll—I'll call again." He backed away.

"I'm afraid you're not likely to find her here. She doesn't come very often. You could get her on the telephone, though, if you didn't want to walk so far."

"I—thanks; the telephone; yes, I will. Thank you very much. Good afternoon."

He came to himself out in the harbor, the oars clasped idly in his hands and the skiff drifting down toward the fish wharves on the Neck. *What* had he said about Peter Blythe? *What* had he said about Peter Blythe's daughter? He groaned aloud. But how was he to have known? It was her own fault; she had deliberately deceived him. She had said that her name was Molly Curtis. Had she, though? Come to think of it, she hadn't actually said so, and only yesterday afternoon she had virtually denied it. No wonder she didn't want to be called Mollie! Paul smiled for the first time in ten minutes. Mollie was a most unattractive name and entirely unsuited to—to—— By Jove, though, what *was* her name?



THE GOLDEN HEART

Mehetabel? Oh, surely not that! That was far worse than Molly. But it was something like Mehetabel. Lord, how he must have amused her! Why, he remembered her when she was a regular little long-legged brat! And he had told her the other day that it was surprising how homely children grow into good-looking women—or something equally pleasant and brilliant! He groaned again, more heartily. The skiff bumped against a spile.

Well, he reflected, what was to be done? He must see her and explain and apologize; that was plain. Then why not now? If he were only dressed for calling he'd go at once. He viewed his attire ruefully; old gray tweeds, no vest, a smooch of orange vermillion on his coat sleeve and no hat. Still, Mrs. Blythe and he were old friends; she wouldn't mind; and Mol—no, Mehet—oh, whatever her name really was—had seen him this way many times. As for old Peter—well, he could go to thunder! Paul seized the oars and drove the skiff up to the nearest landing.

He skirted a half-acre of white and salt-encrusted fish and reached the road. A



THE GOLDEN HEART

small boy indicated his direction and he started forth. It was pretty warm until he had turned into the Popple Head Road and reached the uplands. Here the breeze found him and he trudged on comfortably enough over the sweet-scented moorland. Birds darted and sang about him, the ocean appeared ahead and his spirits rose again. After all, it was just a good joke. No wonder she had impressed him as being out of place in the Golden Heart! He laughed aloud. The road dipped, swung to the right and a thicket of sumac hedged him in. When he had crossed a little bridge over a fern-arched brook his way led upward again and he found himself at the ocean's edge, with the roar of it in his ears. A half-dozen houses were in sight, ahead of him and behind him, and his road lost itself in another which skirted the shore. The houses were all large and imposing, but the one which stood nearest, crowning a rise like a modern castle, was evidently the show-place of all. He wondered if old Peter Blythe had attained to that! He was not long in doubt, however. A gate flanked by



THE GOLDEN HEART

stone pillars, told the story, "The Ledges." Paul whistled.

"It's a regular palace," he muttered, and glanced disparagingly at his clothes. However, he wasn't one to turn back with the goal in sight. He entered the gate and started up the long, curving drive. There were tennis-courts set in the great smooth lawn, and beyond them a formal garden fronted the house. The latter was of gray stone, ivy-draped, rambling, turreted. Striped awnings fluttered above a hundred windows and from stone urns along the terrace trailed vines and bright flowers. Then he caught a glimpse of the shaded end of the wide porch and stopped in his tracks. There were people there! Dozens of people! Ladies in gay afternoon gowns, men in serges and flannels. A decorous butler moved amongst them. Great Scott, he couldn't push in there with his orange vermillion sleeve! And yet it was dollars to doughnuts that he had already been seen and that he was the subject of idle and amused speculation. Retreat was out of the question. "Devil take it!" he muttered.



THE GOLDEN HEART

Then, with a chuckle for his quandary, he went on, his shoulders a little straighter and his head a little higher. He passed within sound of the party on the veranda and was aware of a sudden diminution of the conversation and felt the eyes of the world fixed on the spot of orange vermillion. Ordinarily he would have carried it off with unconcern, but to make his first call on the Blythe's and be introduced to their guests without even a cap to his head was embarrassing to say the least. He climbed the stone steps and paused on the edge of a great porch rug, undecided whether to ring and give his card to a servant or to worm his way between the chairs and flower-decked tables and beard the party under the awnings. He felt somewhat of an ass as he stood there, but in reality he looked rather well with his broad shoulders, good-looking, sun-browned face and careless dark hair. There was a quiet commotion at the end of the veranda and a tall, still handsome woman of forty-odd hurried gracefully toward him just as a butler appeared somewhat haughtily from the doorway.



THE GOLDEN HEART

"Paul Merritt!" exclaimed Mrs. Blythe. "Is it really you?"

She took his hand in both of hers and pressed it delightedly.

"How do you do, Mrs. Blythe?" said Paul. "It's mighty nice of you to remember me."

"Well, I think it was very clever of me," she beamed, "for I never saw any one grow so." She looked him over, critically, smilingly. "Still, your face hasn't changed much. Where have you come from, Paul?"

"From the hotel, Mrs. Blythe. I'm staying here. I've been up here a couple of weeks."

"And you've only just found time to look us up? That wasn't nice at all. Did you walk?" Her gaze searched the drive for signs of a conveyance. "You must be very tired and warm. Come and sit down and let Hall get you something. Natalie will be delighted to see you, and Mr. Blythe, too, when he returns. He's playing golf."

"Do you think I'm dressed for an afternoon party?" asked Paul, glancing at his clothes.



THE GOLDEN HEART

“The idea! As though any one thinks of dressing here! Come along and don’t be ridiculous.”

“Well, I feel a little that way,” he laughed as he followed her down the veranda. The dozens of people resolved on closer acquaintance into fourteen. There were five men in the party, four of them youngsters and one an elderly beau in white flannels with a bunch of bachelor’s buttons in his lapel. The ladies ranged from young girls of eighteen to well-preserved dowagers of fifty. The introductions were informal; Mrs. This, Mrs. That, Miss So-and-So, Miss Thingamabob, and——

“My daughter Natalie, Paul. Natalie, you haven’t forgotten Paul, I’m sure. You two used to be quite good friends when you were a little girl.”

Paul bowed and took the hand extended, wondering whether she would accept him as an old acquaintance or a recent friend. She met his gaze with a pleased, calm smile.

“How do you do, Mr. Merritt? Of course I haven’t forgotten you, although it is a long time since we’ve met, isn’t it?”



THE GOLDEN HEART



"It has seemed so to me," he answered meaningly.

"And you weren't very nice to me the last time, either," she went on. "Hasn't your conscience troubled you, Mr. Merritt?" Paul hesitated, puzzled, trying to discover from her face what rôle she intended him to assume. But she turned to a man on her left. "Don't you think he was rather horrid, Mr. Scott? It was my coming-out party and he put his name down for a dance and then forgot all about me."

"Miss Blythe!" exclaimed Paul. "I'm sure I never did that!"

"Well, you *almost* forgot me. I believe you found me in time to dance half around the room before the music stopped."

"Ought to be drawn and quartered," said Mr. Scott with a grin.

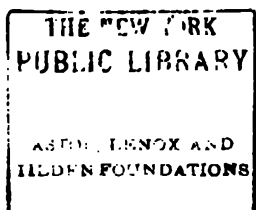
"But I haven't the slightest recollection of such a thing!" declared Paul earnestly. "When was it, please? And where?"

"It was—let me see—three years ago. You were just out of college."

"I do remember now," he acknowledged embarrassedly. "It was at your house.



A PLUMP MATRON IN IRISH LACE DECLARED SHE HAD ALWAYS
WANTED TO TALK TO AN ARTIST



THE GOLDEN HEART

I—I couldn't find you until the dance was almost over."

"And there were other attractions," said Natalie sweetly. "I think one of them was named—Gertrude, wasn't it?"

"I don't remember," he answered. "But I'm certain——"

"Tell us what you are doing here, Paul," interrupted Mrs. Blythe. "I had no idea you were in this part of the world."

So Paul explained at some length and a plump matron in Irish lace declared that she had always wanted to talk to an artist and commanded a blue serge youth to give his seat to Mr. Merritt.

"It must be a wonderful gift," she exclaimed when Paul was established on the edge of her skirts, "to be able to reproduce Nature in all her varying moods, Mr. Merritt. I'm sure you ought to be proud of your talent."

"Please wait until you see some of my pictures," he laughed.

"Oh, but I'm sure they're quite delicious! You have the seeing eye, Mr. Merritt; I saw that at once." Paul blinked. "You



THE GOLDEN HEART

must show me your work. You will, won't you? I'm simply crazy about paintings. Mr. Ryder declares that I care more for them than for gowns and hats; and that's saying a good deal, don't you think, for a woman?"

"If you display the same taste in paintings as in gowns I shall be ashamed to have you see mine."

"Nonsense! That's your modesty. But I like modesty, in young men especially. It's so—so refreshing; one finds so little of it nowadays, Mr. Merritt."

"Your mother is well, Paul? And Mr. Merritt, too, I hope," asked Mrs. Blythe.

"Quite, thank you. My mother asked me to give you her love when I saw you, Mrs. Blythe."

"She's a dear woman, Paul. You must give her mine when you write to her. Where is she this summer?"

"On Long Island. They've been there for several summers."

"Such a jolly place," said Mrs. Ryder enthusiastically. "We used to go there before Mr. Ryder retired from business."



THE GOLDEN HEART

Nowadays we prefer this place because it gives us such a change from the sort of life one leads in the city in Winter. Do you find plenty to paint here, Mr. Merritt?"

"Er—plenty, thanks." He looked across to where Natalie was half hid by the attentive Mr. Scott and a second juvenile. For a brief instant he encountered her gaze. She smiled as one might smile at a new acquaintance enjoying one's hospitality. Paul frowned and brought his wandering attention back to the voluble Mrs. Ryder.

"I noticed that you don't wear any hat," she was saying. "So sensible, I always say. I tried to get Mr. Ryder to do it but he got terribly sun-burned on the top of his head. He's rather bald, you know. It was quite distressing for awhile."

"I should have worn a hat," answered Paul smilingly, "but I didn't think that I'd find myself here when I started out."

"Oh, you mustn't think of changing your ways of living for us, Mr. Merritt! Genius makes it's own laws, you know. Besides, we all lead the Simple Life here in the summer. That's what I like so about Rock-



THE GOLDEN HEART

haven. One needn't dress, you know; it's all so delightfully primitive and natural!" She smoothed her lace skirt over her knees and beamed enthusiasm.

"Quite delightful, yes," murmured Paul, trying to see through Mr. Scott's blonde head. The butler replenished the glasses and the talk went on. Mrs. Ryder confided to Paul that she had always been envious of the Bohemian existence led by artists.

"I've always thought that I was especially suited for the Bohemian Life," she declared. "Society does bore me so, Mr. Merritt! You've no idea what an effort it is! To be care-free, to choose one's own friends irrespective of position or wealth—what more delightful? Ah, you artists are to be envied, Mr. Merritt!"

"I'm afraid," said Paul dryly, "that I'm not much of a Bohemian. I'm rather too fond of soap and water, for one thing."

"O-oh, but surely you don't mean that Bohemians are—are not clean! Why, I've known some perfectly delightful ones, Mr. Merritt; quite gentlemanly and—and distinguished."



THE GOLDEN HEART

"I was thinking of Bohemia in general," said Paul. "The sort of Bohemia one finds in, say, Paris——"

"Oh! Paris, Mr. Merritt! You've lived there? But of course you have; every artist does. Don't you worship it?"

"It's rather jolly—when the weather's decent," replied Paul. "Personally I think I prefer Rockhaven."

"Rockhaven is delightful, isn't it? You must come and see me, Mr. Merritt. We live just a little way up the shore; Ryderhurst, you know. I'd so love to have you meet Mr. Ryder. I'm sure you'd get on together famously. Do you golf?"

"No. I used to play a little in college, but never since. You see, they don't go in much for sport in Bohemia, Mrs. Ryder."

"I'm afraid their pleasures aren't quite so innocent," she said archly. "Is that my car, Hall? Well, good-bye, Mr. Merritt. You will let me see some of your work, won't you? And drop in and see us any time. We're almost always at home, you know; we lead such a quiet, humdrum life here."

Mrs. Ryder carried away two of the juve-



THE GOLDEN HEART

niles and the elderly beau in her train, and in the course of the next quarter of an hour the rest of the visitors disappeared in carriages and automobiles. Paul attached himself to Natalie, but as she was saying good-bye most of the time he had scant opportunity for conversation.

"Don't you go, Paul," said Mrs. Merritt. "You must stay to dinner. Mr. Blythe will be home before long."

"That's awfully good of you," he answered, "but I'm not dressed for dinner. Some other time——"

"There's no time like the present," she said merrily. "And we're all alone this evening and it won't matter what you wear. Sit down and talk to Natalie while I telephone to Mrs. Ryder and tell her that she's left her purse."

"Mama bosses us all the same way," laughed Natalie as he took his seat beside her. "I guess you'll have to stay, Mr. Merritt."

"I shall be delighted to if you're quite sure you won't mind my appearance. You see, Miss—Natalie——"

"Yes?"



THE GOLDEN HEART

"Do you know, I had an idea all along that it wasn't Molly!"

"Really? How clever. But I thought you said that it just suited me."

"Oh! Well, that was mere conversation. It didn't suit you at all. Now Natalie—" he looked at her admiringly—"Natalie is just what it should be. You couldn't have been anything else but Natalie!"

"Not—Mehetabel?" she asked mockingly.

"I've got a wretched memory for names," he said.

"And how about faces?"

"That, too, perhaps. But it's been a long time since I saw you, and you've changed, you know."

"Yes, so I understand. It's remarkable how ugly children grow up to be fairly good-looking, isn't it, Mr. Merritt."

"I know," he said humbly. "I deserve it. I suppose I said some quite unpardonable things. But I think you might be merciful. After all, it wasn't quite fair, was it?"

"No, it wasn't. I'm sorry, really. I was just a little bit piqued, I think, that you didn't remember me——"



THE GOLDEN HEART



"But—you don't mean that you knew me?"

"Oh, but I did. My memory is fairly good, you see. I knew you as soon as I saw you. But you didn't recognize me, and so, when you jumped to the conclusion that I was Molly Curtis I let you think so. Shall we call quits, Mr. Merritt?"

"Yes, please do. And—and about yesterday——"

"Yesterday? Well?" she asked coolly.

"I behaved miserably and I'm awfully ashamed of myself. I—I don't know just what got into me, Natalie." Natalie's brows went up.

"Natalie?" she repeated doubtfully.

"Certainly; why not? I used to call you Natalie, didn't I?"

"Yes, when you took any notice of me at all," she replied. "But— isn't it a little different now?"

"Much," he said emphatically. "It ought to be Dear Natalie now."

"After yesterday?" she asked, avoiding his eyes.

"You've forgiven me for that."

THE GOLDEN HEART

"Have I? I—don't know. I haven't said so. You were rather ill-behaved yesterday, Mr. Merritt."

"Don't you think you might call me Paul?"

"Oh, my, no! It would seem so—so disrespectful! You see, three years ago—and before that, too—I used to hold you in awe; we all did, all us kids at the impressionable age of sixteen or so. You were the handsome, fascinating Mr. Merritt. We were all quite wild about you. Didn't you know that?"

Paul shook his head.

"No. Were *you*—wild about me, too?"

"I was the worst of all! And when you came to my coming-out party and paid me no more attention than a graven image and even forgot our dance I was quite heart-broken. I'm not sure that I can ever forgive that."

"I must have been a rude brute," he said wonderingly. "I can just remember that party. It was a week or so before I went to Paris. I fancy my head was so full of Paris that—that——"



THE GOLDEN HEART

"There wasn't room for poor little me? But you forget Gertrude, Mr. Merritt."

"I'm afraid I do," he answered, with a puzzled frown. "Who *was* Gertrude, please?"

"Don't you *really* remember?"

"Not the slightest."

"Then I shan't tell you. It was quite desperate while it lasted, though. You really must have a miserable memory, Paul."

"That sounds better," he said triumphantly. Natalie smiled.

"That was just an accident. I shan't do it again."

"Ever?"

"Of course not. Why should I?"

"Not—after yesterday?"

"All the more reason," she replied lightly. "Now I must dress."

"But you are dressed!"

"Not for dinner. Come along and I'll have Hall show you to a room. Or you can amuse yourself with billiards if you like. Papa will be home in a few minutes."

"I'd much rather talk," he said. "It's only six o'clock."



THE GOLDEN HEART

"We dine at seven."

"You don't need a whole hour to dress, surely," he protested.

"Don't I? Well, I'll hurry, then. Shall I?"

"*Please, Natalie.*"

"There you go again!"

"But I'm going to call you that—always—or until you'll let me call you something—nicer."

"Really! If you talk nonsense I'll not hurry."

"Then I'll—be good."

She shook her head. "I'm losing faith in your promises," she said. And to the butler: "Hall, show Mr. Merritt to a room, please."

"But—you won't be long?" he begged as she started up the stairs.

"Not more than—fifty minutes."

"Twenty!"

"O-oh, the idea! We'll compromise and say—thirty. Good-bye."

She smiled down at him over the banisters.

"Good-bye, you—*dear!*" he whispered.



XVI.

FIFTEEN minutes later Paul, having performed such toilet as was possible, adventured down the hallway in search of the billiard room and found it without difficulty, a great quadrangular apartment finished in dark oak. There were two tables, each lighted by low-hung electroleets under green glass. A broad seat, cushioned in red leather, ran along a side and the walls were well filled with pictures. A wide stone fireplace almost filled one end of the room and on the high mantel above Paul discovered his painting of *The Golden Heart*, evidently awaiting disposition. He took a cigarette from a box lying on a table, tapped it on his thumb nail and studied the picture. It wasn't so bad, after all, he reflected with a little glow of satisfaction. If he could always do work as good as that perhaps he would be justified in keeping on. And yet—

Footsteps ascended the stairs and approached along the corridor and a moment



THE GOLDEN HEART

later Mr. Blythe, his ample figure attired in golfing costume, entered. He was quite accustomed to finding stray guests loitering about The Ledges and so displayed no surprise as he walked over to the fireplace and helped himself to the cigarettes.

"Good evening," he said, nodding politely.

"Good evening," responded Paul, a trifle amused to find that he was not recognized. Apparently, though, his host felt dimly that he ought to know the tall youth, for he eyed him surreptitiously as he lighted his cigarette and tossed the match into the grate.

"Looking at the picture?" he asked. "It's a new one; just got it yesterday. What do you think of it?"

"Well, perhaps I oughtn't to judge it," responded Paul.

"Oh!" Mr. Blythe turned and scrutinized him frankly in an effort to place him. "You mean—"

"Well, I paint myself, you see."

"Yes, yes, of course," said Mr. Blythe vaguely. "Well, I like it. Done by a man named Merritt. Know him?"



THE GOLDEN HEART

"Quite well," answered Paul gravely.

"Really? How's he stand?"

"Well, he's young yet and not very well known."

"I see. Nice color in that, though, eh? My daughter persuaded me to buy it. It's a view of that tea house she's interested in across the Neck; painted from the harbor side."

"You say Miss Blythe persuaded you to buy it?" asked Paul with elaborate carelessness.

"Yes; that is, in a way. I always make a point of buying a picture at the tea house now and then, and this was her choice the last time. By the way, I—er—I haven't anything of yours, have I?"

"Paintings? One, Mr. Blythe."

"Have I really? I'd forgotten. Er—you mean the—the——" He looked about the room.

"The landscape, yes," responded Paul, enjoying himself hugely. Mr. Blythe coughed somewhat embarrassedly.

"Let me see," he asked, "what was the subject?"



THE GOLDEN HEART

"The tea house—from the harbor side, Mr. Blythe."

"Eh?" Mr. Blythe looked from Paul to the picture and back again. "You mean—*this*."

"That's the one, sir."

"Well, well! Rather a joke on me, eh? Glad to meet you, Mr. Merritt." He shook hands cordially. "You're staying to dinner, of course?"

"Mrs. Blythe was kind enough to ask me. I'm not exactly in dinner dress, though."

"Don't give it a thought. I'll keep you company, sir, if there's no one else coming. Do you happen to know how that is?"

"Mrs. Blythe said there would be no one else, I think."

"Good! I'll just run along and get into something fresh and informal. You'll excuse me, pray. Make yourself quite at home, Mr. Merritt. You'll find cigars and cigarettes here and the bell's over there if you need anything else." He started toward the door, but hesitated and turned back. "Er—have we met before, Mr. Merritt? Your face seems confoundingly familiar to me."



THE GOLDEN HEART



"Some three years ago," answered Paul smilingly.

"I knew it! In New York, was it?"

"In New York, yes, sir."

"Merritt—Merritt—What's the first name, Mr. Merritt?"

"Paul."

"Paul Merritt—er—Paul—God bless my soul! You don't mean to say——" Mr. Peter Blythe fixed his glasses firmly and surveyed Paul amazedly. "Why, it is Paul! Why, you young scalliwag!" He seized Paul's hand again and rang it heartily. "What do you mean by imposing on me this way? When did you come? What are you doing here?"

"I've been here about a fortnight," laughed Paul. "I'm painting." He nodded at the picture on the mantel.

"That is your work, then?" asked Mr. Blythe in astonishment. "Why didn't Natalie tell me? What is this, a conspiracy?"

"No, sir, not exactly. She assured me that you bought that painting because you liked it and that you didn't know I painted it. I thought myself it was rather a mean

THE GOLDEN HEART

trick to play on you, Mr. Blythe, but Natalie seemed to think it was a fair deal, and so——”

“Never suspected for a moment!” declared Mr. Blythe. “Think of old Jim Merritt’s boy being a painter! I remember now that I did hear something about your being in Paris studying art, but I’d forgotten. Bless me, I thought you were coming into the office, Paul; we need smart young fellows like you there. This—this painting business isn’t going to be a regular thing, is it?”

“I hardly know yet,” answered Paul. “Lately, though, I’ve been thinking that maybe I wasn’t cut out for a painter.”

“Of course not! Anyone could see that!” Mr. Blythe unconsciously glanced at the picture, to Paul’s amusement. “You come to us, Paul; we’ll treat you right, son, and make a good useful member of society out of you. Bless me!” He looked hurriedly at his watch. “I must run along. We’ll talk this over after dinner.” He paused in the doorway to add: “I like pictures, Paul, and admire a man who can do a beautiful



THE GOLDEN HEART

thing with paint and canvas, but if you want to see what I call a real work of art you go to New York and have a look at the new Consolidated Land and Title Building that we've just finished." He nodded his head impressively. "That's the kind of Art, Paul, that pays dividends!"



XVII.

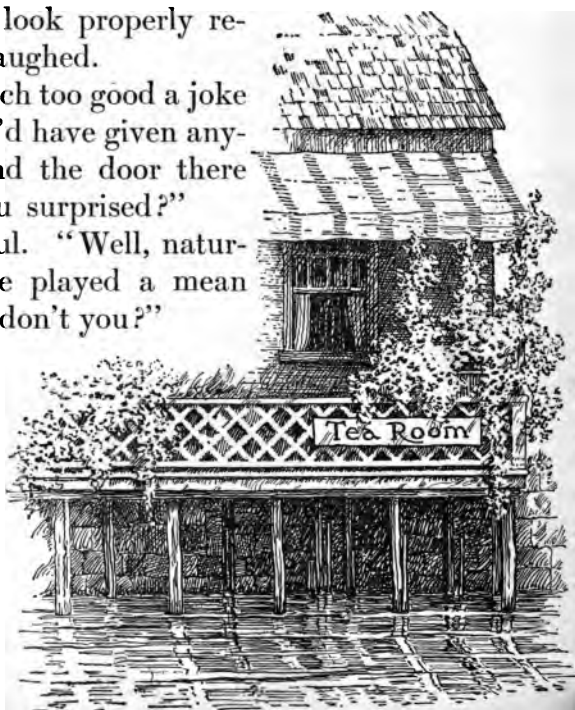
THAT was a merry dinner party. Natalie told how Paul had appeared at the Golden Heart and demanded tea at eleven o'clock in the morning and had failed to recognize her; how he had mistaken her for Molly Curtis; how they had lunched together there the day of the storm; and much more. And Mrs. Blythe said with smiling reproach:

"Do you mean to tell me, Natalie, that you and Paul have been seeing each other almost every day for two weeks and you've never told me a word about it?"

Paul had the grace to look properly regretful, but Natalie only laughed.

"Mama dear, it was much too good a joke to be spoiled by telling. I'd have given anything to have been behind the door there this afternoon! Were you surprised?"

"Was I!" answered Paul. "Well, naturally. I consider that she played a mean trick on me, Mrs. Blythe; don't you?"



THE GOLDEN HEART

"I certainly do," was the answer. Mrs. Blythe was regarding him across the table with a new and speculative interest, reflecting that much may happen when two young people are together almost daily for a fortnight.

"It's nothing to the trick she played on me," said her father. "Made me buy that picture of yours, Paul, and told me she didn't know who you were."

"Papa, I didn't make you buy it!" cried Natalie. "You liked it tremendously, you know you did. You said you thought I'd like to have it and I said I would, but that I'd think more of it if it was a gift from you."

"I'm going to pay the purchase price back to you, sir," said Paul. "Natalie has agreed to accept the painting as a gift from me."

"Why, I haven't!"

"Nothing of the sort, Paul! I'm very fond of that picture; admire it greatly. Couldn't think of letting it go. Besides, if you do that you cheat the Golden Heart out of its commission. I suppose you know, Paul, that the tea house is only a charity in disguise?"

204



THE GOLDEN HEART

"No, sir, I've never understood about the tea house."

"Well, this Miss Curtis used to go to school with Natalie. Her father was in business over in New Jersey somewhere and was killed in a train wreck. Didn't leave a red cent behind him and Molly Curtis and a young brother were left on their own resources. I took the boy into the office and he's done very well. Natalie had this tea house built and put Molly Curtis in there to run it. It's a pretty good proposition for Miss Curtis, but I believe Natalie has to doctor her books a bit to show a profit." Mr. Blythe winked gravely.

"Papa, that's a horrid fib!" Natalie exclaimed indignantly. "Last Summer was the only Summer I didn't come out ahead. And that was because everyone was hard-up and wouldn't spend their money. We're going to do splendidly this year."

"Glad to hear it," answered Mr. Blythe. "I may want to borrow a million or so this Fall."

"And may I enquire," asked Paul, "where it got its name?"



THE GOLDEN HEART

"By accident," answered Natalie, laughing. "When it was being built three years ago I used to go there and stay by the hour watching the workmen. I was terribly excited about it, of course. And one day, when it was almost done and they were putting on the shingles, I was on the balcony and somehow this chain broke——"

"Why, you're wearing it, Natalie," exclaimed her mother. "I haven't seen the locket for a long while, dear."

Natalie laid a heart-shaped gold locket on the table.

"I—I put it on to-night to illustrate my story," returned Natalie. "The chain broke, Mr. Merritt, and the locket fell into the water. I felt quite badly about it and one of the carpenters came to the rescue. He went in after it. You could see it on the sand, you know. He had to dive two or three times before he got it. And when I came home and told papa about it he said I'd quite lost my heart to the tea house, and so I just called it The Golden Heart."

"Ask her to let you see it, Paul," suggested her father.



THE GOLDEN HEART

The locket disappeared suddenly and Natalie shook her head.

"Nobody may see inside of it," she said smilingly.

"She carries her sweetheart's picture there, Paul," whispered Mr. Blythe hoarsely.

"You'll never know," said Natalie serenely.

"If she does," observed Mrs. Blythe, "I'm afraid she's gone back on him of late, for I'm positive I haven't seen her wear the locket for fully a year."

"One doesn't have to wear a thing to treasure it," replied Natalie serenely. "Anyhow, Mr. Merritt, that's how The Golden Heart got its name. Come, mama, they're dying to smoke."

After the ladies had withdrawn across the hall Paul and Mr. Blythe sat for some time in the dim rose-glow of the candles and talked. Strictly speaking, it was Mr. Blythe who did most of the talking. He talked about the business, and as that was a favorite subject with him and as Paul was an ideal audience he became very eloquent and very interesting. Paul discovered that the



THE GOLDEN HEART



building field was a veritable Land of Romance. Mr. Blythe told of contracts they had fought for or schemed for, won or missed; of construction problems and difficulties successfully solved and overcome. His enthusiasm communicated itself to his listener and Paul awoke to a realization that the business wasn't merely a set of books kept in a mahogany-panelled office. It offered romance and even adventure and a chance to match his brain and wit against worthy foemen.

"When you join us," said Mr. Blythe—he took it for granted that Paul would join—"you'd better make up your mind to spend six or eight months in the office and learn that end of the business first. Then we'll find something more interesting for you."

"It all sounds a good deal more interesting than I thought it was," said Paul. "And I—it rather appeals to me, sir."

"Of course it does! It would appeal to any young chap with red blood in him. It's a wonderful business, a business that grows more wonderful every year. You think about it, Paul; there's no hurry; no need to start before Fall."

THE GOLDEN HEART

"If I decide to go into the office, Mr. Blythe, I'd want to go pretty soon, I think."

"Would, eh? Well, that's good. It would please your father, Paul, and I know it would please me. I've always been sorry I hadn't a boy of my own to go on with the work when I get through. Well, shall we move across?"

In the big living-room Mr. Blythe demanded music. "You sing, don't you, Paul?" he asked.

"Like a walrus," laughed Paul.

"Um; never heard a walrus. Then it's up to you, I guess, Chick."

"Perhaps Mr. Merritt doesn't care for music," said Natalie.

"But I do!" he assured her, following her to the piano. "I didn't know you sang," he added as he raised the lid for her.

"I don't—much," she laughed. "But papa paid for my lessons and so I try to make him think his money wasn't wasted."

But she didn't do herself justice, for her voice, if not strong, was very clear and sweet and had been well cultivated. Paul hung delightedly over the piano and watched and



THE GOLDEN HEART

listened. Like many who are themselves unable to "carry a tune" he was very fond of music and very susceptible to it.

"Sing that thing I like so much, Chick," said Mr. Blythe, presently; "the one about the yellow on the corn and the berry on the thorn. Got it there, haven't you?"

"Yes, dear. Will you look for it, Mr. Merritt, please? It's in that pile beside you, I think; 'Beloved, it is Morn' is the title." She began playing one of Nevin's Songs without Words while Paul searched for the music. When he had found it he placed it on the rack in front of her and she smiled her thanks. "This is it, papa," she called.

Beloved, it is morn!
A redder berry on the thorn,
A deeper yellow on the corn
For this good day newborn.
Pray, sweet, for me that I may be
Faithful to God and thee.

She sang it very sweetly and softly, her fingers seeming to hover over the keys without touching them and her head bent slightly so that Paul, turning the sheet at her nod, saw only the pale brown of her hair and one smooth cheek.

210



THE GOLDEN HEART

Beloved, it is day!
And lovers work as children play,
With heart and brain untired 'alway.
Dear love, look up and pray,
Pray, sweet, for me that I may be
Faithful to God and thee.

Beloved, it is night!
Thy heart and mine are full of light,
Thy spirit shineth clear and white.
God keep thee in His sight.
Pray, sweet, for me that I may be,
Faithful to God and thee.

Her voice died away and her hands slipped from the keyboard to her lap. There was a moment's silence. Then she looked up with a grave smile.

"Do you like it?" she asked.

Paul nodded. He couldn't have trusted himself to speak just then, for his heart was full of a mingled pain and joy that threatened to choke him. He reached down and closed the lid. She glanced up again and their eyes met. She smiled gently and arose from the bench.

"No more, dear?" asked Mrs. Blythe.

"No more," answered Natalie lightly. She moved over to one of the long windows which stood open onto the veranda and Paul followed her.



THE GOLDEN HEART

"What a night!" she said softly. Unconsciously they stepped together through the window. The quiet plash of the waves came to them, and with it a faint breath, warm and salty, from the broad bosom of the ocean. Straight ahead a great full moon was riding up into the purple sky and the white radiance fell on her uplifted face, on her bare neck, and slender, rounded arms. The air was soft with Summer and fragrant with the scent of the moors and the spicy perfume of the nasturtiums that clambered along the railing.

"I'm afraid," he said anxiously, "that you ought to have something over your shoulder."

"I'll find a scarf," she answered.

"Can't I——"

"No, thanks, you wouldn't know where to look." She disappeared into the house, leaving Paul alone there with the moon and his thoughts. After that night the sight of the full moon was always like the sudden clutch of fingers around his heart. She was back in a moment with a silver-spangled scarf about her shoulders. The



THE GOLDEN HEART

moonlight played on it with little flecks of pale fire.

"Shall we sit down somewhere?" he asked. "I—I've got something I want to say to you."

They passed along the veranda until the lights from the living-room were far away. There was a swinging hammock here and Natalie seated herself in a corner of it and set it slowly asway. Paul drew a chair up and asked permission to smoke. But after the cigarette was burning he kept silence until Natalie laughed softly and said: "Well, Mr. Merritt?"

"I was thinking," he answered slowly, "that you looked like the Spirit of Moonlight there, with your white gown and——"

"Perhaps you mean Moonshine," she responded lightly.

"No." He discovered that the cigarette had gone out, and he tossed it away, arose and took his place beside her on the swinging seat. "I've been talking to your father, Natalie, about going into the business."

"Does he think you ought to?" she asked.

"Yes; do you?"



THE GOLDEN HEART

She set the hammock aswing again with a slender foot and smiled across at him. The moonlight fell full upon her face and soft, pale hair and made silver pools of her eyes. Paul clenched his hands tightly between his knees, mastered by a great longing and a great fear.

"I? But it doesn't matter what I think, surely."

"It matters a whole lot, Natalie. I'm going to decide to-night before I leave here, and I want you to help me."

"But— isn't this rather sudden? I thought you had the whole summer to decide in."

"Yes, if I want to take it, but I don't. I'm twenty-six years old and it's time I was doing something, one thing or another. And—there's another thing that makes me want to decide, too. So I want you to tell me what you think, please."

"But—I don't know!"

"Well—" He was silent a moment. "If I decided to give up the painting I'd return to New York in a week or so, I think, and get to work."



THE GOLDEN HEART

"That would be rather unkind, wouldn't it?" she asked smilingly. "Just when we're beginning to know you again."

"Would you care?"

"Of course! Why, I was almost getting ready to forgive you for the way you treated me at my party."

"I hope you will. Haven't you—yet?"

"Not—quite, I think." She shook her head gently, staring at the moon.

"Please do—forgive me," he said softly. His hand found hers on the edge of the seat. It lay very still under his fingers. "You will—Natalie?"

"Are you very, very sorry?" she asked.

"Very, very sorry," he answered. He raised the hand to his lips and pressed kisses against the slender, warm fingers. The hand didn't try to flutter away, but lay quite passively in his.

"Natalie!" he whispered.

The blue eyes turned slowly to his. The moonlit face held a grave smile.

"Yes?" she asked quietly.

"Dear, is there any hope for me? I love you so, love you so, Natalie!"



THE GOLDEN HEART

The face turned slowly away again, the lashes fell over the blue eyes and a little tremor shook the white shoulders. He leaned forward and found her other hand.

"Natalie! Sweetheart! Do you care a little? I want you to marry me, dear, to be my wife! I want to work for you, dear, to do something big and be something. I'm nothing at all now, I know, but I will be. I'll—I'll do something to make you proud of me, dear. Can you love me a little?"

The lashes were lifted and the moonlight fell fathoms deep in her eyes. They met Paul's gaze for an instant, and then, with a little wordless sound he put his arms around her and her lips met his very bravely and sweetly.

Ages after—or was it only a few minutes?—time often travels a strange gait—she drew away and the slender golden chain caught on a button of his coat. He released it and then smilingly picked up the locket and studied it.

"I wonder—what's inside," he said.

"You heard what papa said," she an-



THE GOLDEN HEART

swered, her eyes dancing from his to the locket.

"If I thought that, I'd——" He made a motion as though to hurl it across the railing.

"Would you like to see?" she whispered, taking it out of his hand.

"Yes—no—I don't know. Do you want me to?"

"Yes—no—I don't know myself," she mimicked. "I suppose you'd think me terribly silly if I showed you."

He kissed the hand that held the locket.

"If that's all you're afraid of, show me," he said.

"Well——" She hesitated, laughed softly and opened it. "There!"

She placed it in his hand again and he bent forward so that the moonlight fell on it.

"Natalie!" he cried.

"Well?" she asked demurely.

"Why—but—where did you ever get it? And why did you wear it, dear?"

She bent her face close to his and looked at the picture in the moonlight.

"I got it years ago—when I was a silly little girl. It was in your college paper.



THE GOLDEN HEART



You were on the hockey team and you'd beaten somebody or other and they printed a picture of you all. I cut yours out and put it in here. Wasn't that—ridiculous?"

"It was wonderful!" he said. "You don't mean that you ever—thought of me then?"

"N-no, not exactly, Paul, but—I was always a little bit fond of you." She laid her cheek against his shoulder and sighed happily. "Do you—mind?"

Very much later he said good-night to Mr. and Mrs. Blythe, and Natalie walked with him down the curving driveway to the gate. They parted there in the blessed shadows of the big stone pillars, with the wash of the sea in their ears and the big friendly moon shining down upon them.

"It's all so strange," he marvelled, "so wonderful, dear!"

"So wonderful!" she echoed dreamily. "It doesn't seem—quite right, Paul, for anyone to be as—as happy as I am!"

"Are you happy, dear?" he whispered, bending to kiss her.

"Frightfully! So happy that—it hurts, Paul!"

THE GOLDEN HEART

A moment later she was all solicitude.

"You ought to have let Leon take you back," she said. "It's such a long way, Paul, and—and you haven't any hat!"

"I'm too happy to ride to-night, sweetheart," he declared. "I'd have leaped out of the car. As for a hat, why, I never wear one if I can help it."

"But if you caught cold——! Wait; I know!" She slipped the golden chain from about her neck. "Here's an amulet, Paul, to keep harm away. Put it in your pocket and you'll be quite safe. I know, because—because it's kept me safe—safe for you, Paul—for all these years."

"But, Natalie, it's——"

"Yes, dear," she whispered happily, "it's the golden heart."

THE END



203
14



OCT 3 1938

